



Liaison Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Political Polling Committee: follow-up

Wednesday 28 October 2020

9.55 am

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Members present: Lord McFall of Alcluith (The Chair); Lord Bradley; Lord Davies of Oldham; Lord Judge; Lord Lang of Monkton; Earl Howe; Lord Low of Dalston; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Lord Tyler; Baroness Walmsley; together with Lord Lipsey; Lord Hayward; Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve and Lord Rennard.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 8

Witnesses

I: Patrick Sturgis, Professor of Quantitative Social Science, Department of Methodology, London School of Economics; Stephen Fisher, Associate Professor in Political Sociology, University of Oxford.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Patrick Sturgis and Professor Stephen Fisher.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome. I am Lord McFall of Alcluith, Chair of the Liaison Committee. I am delighted to be assisted today by Lord Lipsey, chair of the former Committee on Political Polling and Digital Media, and some former members of that Committee. Thank you for participating in this new procedure, which was one of the many recommendations of the 18-month review of House of Lords committees, which reported last year. I draw attention to the declarations of interests of Members who are participating in the meeting.

Lord Lipsey: Thanks to everybody for all the work that has gone into setting up this session under unusual conditions. I wonder whether I could start with a question to you, Patrick. The history goes a bit like this. In 2015, the polls were a bit out; they were out again for the 2016 referendum; then we had your inquiry, which suggested various changes; then 2017 was an even worse disaster than before you reported. When there was cause for people to start despairing, suddenly in 2019 the polls, I am delighted to say, were bang on the button.

Would you like to reflect on that and tell us, in particular, what technical changes the polls have made that helped them to the right result in 2019?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: Thank you, Lord Lipsey. It is nice to see you, albeit in these circumstances. It is interesting to reflect back on that progression from 2015. I have one slight disagreement with your account of it, which is the 2017 election being a bigger disaster than the previous ones. There were clearly errors there, but, across the board, the estimates were pretty good. They were pretty much on the money for the Conservatives, the Lib Dems and the smaller parties. Unusually in that election, the direction of Labour error was an underestimation; historically, of course, the polls have tended to overestimate Labour support.

Ironically, that can be explained partly by one of our recommendations in 2015, which was to do with turnout weighting. That is one of the trickiest things that pollsters have to deal with: they obtain samples of the general population, and then they somehow have to figure out which of their respondents are going to vote. There is no sure-fire method of doing that. In different countries, it depends on the electoral registration system and so on. In the UK, we have tended to rely on people telling us how likely they are to vote, on a 1-to-10 scale or something like that. We have various ways of dealing with it, but, of course, it is very imperfect data. People are not good judges of their own future behaviour and there are social norms in voting that lead people to misreport.

In our report, we recommended using a more statistically sophisticated and perhaps justifiable approach, which in effect is building a statistical model using data from the previous election. That has some benefits as an approach. The risk is that the patterns of turnout change from one election to another. That is what happened in 2017. I would not say that explains all the error in that, but some pretty aggressive turnout weighting was

applied, which seems to have repressed the Labour share somewhat.

As I say, it is a bit of an irony that one of our recommendations led to the polls being worse in 2017, but I think that reflects the spirit of the recommendations that we made to pollsters in that these were not sure-fire ways of fixing everything for good. Polling is too difficult, dynamic and historically contingent to do that; we will probably come on to those issues. We offered our recommendations in the spirit of, "These are things you might consider". These were areas where we saw some ad hoc practices and things that could do with a more robust approach, with no guarantee that this would fix things for ever. In 2019, the polls did very well indeed. I guess we would construct the story that 2017 was about tweaking things; and 2019 was when things went very well, after sufficient time to consider any mistakes in 2017.

Of course, we do not have an inquiry when the polls are right. At this point, we are not entirely clear why things went as well as they did for the 2019 polls. Partly, that is to do with the nature of the election itself. Perhaps it was an easier election to call, in the sense of the parties being quite far apart and the underlying dynamics perhaps making it somewhat easier to model. Therefore, the weighting procedures were more effective.

Lord Lipsey: With the American polls on the presidential election, nearly every report I have read from anybody responsible emphasises that there is a margin of error either way. Indeed, one of the main sources gives what the result would be if the error was the same as in the last presidential election in 2016. I did not see a lot of emphasis on margins of error in the reporting of the 2019 election. As it turned out, it was not necessary, but is there more to be done there?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: As a statistician, I am always urging people to be clearer about the uncertainty in estimates. Polls are generally commissioned to produce news, and the news is not about saying, "Things are pretty much the same as they were yesterday", so there is always that pressure. I do not have any hard evidence of this, but anecdotally that sort of reporting—"Labour surges to one-point lead"—is less common these days.

The British Polling Council has now released new guidance, not about the margin of error on individual polls, but on being aware of the historical errors in the final polls. We need to be cognisant of the fact that the polls have a history of systematic errors. That has not filtered through yet; it is a fairly recent development. Maybe Professor Curtice will say something about that in his evidence.

Lord Lipsey: Steve, do you want to add anything to Patrick's comprehensive reply?

Professor Stephen Fisher: I agree by and large with what Patrick said. A lot of the pollsters that applied the most aggressive turnout weighting, pushing down the Conservatives and pushing up Labour, undid the changes they had made between 2015 and 2017 by the time of the 2019 general election. There was some retrospective learning in 2019 from the problems

of 2017. At the same time, there was some important prospective analysis, which picked up the tendency for people who had voted Labour in 2017 to be less likely to recall having voted for Labour when asked by pollsters in mid-2019.

Some pollsters, like YouGov and Opinium, which have long panels of respondents, could track this process. Others could track it through repeated cross-sectional surveys; I am thinking particularly of Joel Williams at Kantar. The pollsters that did best in 2019 were the ones that anticipated this problem and made adjustments for it in the 2019 general election campaign.

Q2 Lord Hayward: A number of witnesses suggested to the Committee that there had been a decline in class-based voting in recent years and an increase in voting volatility. Do you agree? If so, is it becoming more difficult for pollsters to predict voting intention? Is there a case for relying more on other metrics such as higher education?

Picking up on comments both the witnesses have made in relation to 2017 and 2019, was it easier to get 2019 right because both Jeremy Corbyn and Brexit were consistent factors and influences on voters? Therefore, is there not a probability that in 2023, given that both of them are not likely to be there—one of them is already not—the polls will be more inaccurate than they were in 2019?

Professor Stephen Fisher: On the last bit, I disagree. If you think about Corbyn's career as leader of the Labour Party, his popularity was like a rollercoaster in the polls. He became incredibly unpopular, then very popular during the 2017 general election campaign and then unpopular again. Even the consistency of having the same leader does not mean consistency of public reaction. That is difficult.

Both 2017 and 2019 ought to have been, in historical terms, very easy elections to poll, because you have relatively recent major electoral events and you can use past vote weighting for those. By far the best predictor of vote choice that we have is how people voted in a previous election. In the two most recent general elections, there has been the added extremely important factor of how people voted in the Brexit referendum.

Both 2017 and 2019 were close enough to the Brexit referendum and the previous general election for there to be a lot of confidence in recall, despite what I said earlier. The pollsters have the means now to check the quality of recall. There has not been too much demographic change since the previous election, so the issues of population turnover since the previous election are smaller than they were, for instance, in 2015, a good five years away from the previous general election in 2010.

To the questions about class and education, yes, class has become very weak, particularly as pollsters measure it, through social grade. It was already very weak by 2015. I would still say it is good to weight by social grade, if only to ensure that, if something changes with respect to social grade, you still have some balance there. Equally, you still want the views of people of different social grades fairly and proportionately represented

in your opinion poll, not least because there are lots of other opinion questions; it is not all about vote intention. You are quite right that education is an extremely powerful predictor, along with age, which pollsters should be using to weight variables these days.

Lord Hayward: That is very interesting.

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I apologise if it is boring when witnesses agree with each other, but I very much agree with Steve. Yes, social class as a cleavage of party-political support has declined, as I am sure everyone here will be aware. There is a very nice account of this in Maria Sobolewska's and Robert Ford's new book *Brexitland*. That means that it is much less powerful a predictor than variables like graduates versus non-graduates, age and so on.

That is true, but it does not therefore make it more difficult for pollsters to predict elections. I have made this point already, but polling methodology, at least in so far as we are talking about the modelling and weighting parts of it, is an ongoing battle. Society changes, politics changes, and pollsters have to respond in how they are modelling the data. We see these shifts in the variables that are more important to weight. That is one of the things pollsters are always doing: experimenting.

On the British Polling Council's website, there is a very useful account from the pollsters, the members of the BPC, about how they are approaching their methodology for the election. They are reporting, "We've tried this weighting. We've dropped the weighting that we used for the number of kids in the household or having a car. Now we're experimenting with ethnicity", and so on. That is and always will be a feature of polling.

So, yes, that is an important change, but I do not see it as a disadvantage for the pollsters.

Lord Hayward: Professor Fisher, you almost implied that it was guaranteed that in 2023 the polls would be inaccurate, given your analysis of the circumstances from 2015 to 2019. Did you mean that?

Professor Stephen Fisher: I did not imply it as a guarantee. I agree that, if the next general election is in 2023, that being a good four years away from the last general election, past vote weighting might be trickier. There is more risk that it will go wrong. It will be a harder general election to poll.

Q3 Lord Smith of Hindhead: Good morning. The Committee received evidence that reporting by the media of political polling improved between 2015 and 2017. My question is in three parts. First, did this trend continue in 2019? Secondly, how have changes in the guidance issued by the Market Research Society affected this situation? Thirdly, how do you anticipate the guidance of the British Polling Council issued earlier this month will help?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I am not able to comment on any hard evidence about the way the media have changed. My answer would be based on my own anecdotal experience. I follow the reporting of the polls reasonably closely, and I guess that would align with my experience. We

have seen an improvement in reporting. What do we attribute that to? Lots of things have changed, in addition to the House of Lords' own report, the BPC regulations and so on.

We often look at social media as a cause of lots of problems, but it is more balanced than that: it brings both good and bad things. It creates communities of practice, norms and so on. There is a large community of people, including academics, pollsters, interested citizens and so on, who, if there is bad practice in the reporting of polls in the media or the conduct of polls, will very quickly descend on it and make it an emblematic case of bad practice. That did not happen in the past. Journalists and pollsters are much more aware that they can get themselves into trouble if they do something reputationally very damaging in a way that did not happen in the past. That is one of the positive things that we can observe in modern social media.

The specific aspects of the guidance from the MRS and the BPC, both of which I have read, are very useful. There is a question about the extent to which journalists will be aware of them and use them—you can lead a horse to water, and so on—but I see them as very positive developments. There are other resources available. The American Association for Public Opinion Research makes similar kinds of guides available. It can only be a good thing that these resources are there. The question will be the uptake by journalists.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: Were you happy with the way the media reported the 2019 polls?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: Yes, there was nothing that sticks in my mind as an egregiously bad case of reporting. A lot of journalists who report on polls are more statistically aware these days. They are aware of the problematic practices of the past, and they are wary of being held up as a bad example of reporting. I see evidence of positive moves in that direction.

Professor Stephen Fisher: I broadly share Patrick's opinion and approach. As an academic who was pretty busy during the campaign, I did not read many reports of individual polls. I tended to get the polls from certain websites and not read how they were written up. None the less, I did see some of the reporting. My main concern in this election was an overemphasis on how the polls might be wrong in the same way as in 2017, with no discussion of whether they might be wrong in the same direction as in 2015. There was a lot of caution as to whether the Tories were really going to get a majority, but not much discussion of how, if the polls were wrong in the same way as in 2015, the Conservatives might be heading towards a landslide.

On the day after the election, quite a lot of people were surprised by the comfortable majority that the Conservatives got. That should not have been a terrible surprise to people. The vote share was well within the margins of error, and that kind of result was easily anticipatable from simple uniform swing projections from the average of the polls. It was

slightly higher than those uniform swing projections; the Tories outperformed uniform change but not by a huge amount. There should not have been such a sense of surprise after the election.

Professor Patrick Sturgis: Going back to the campaigning, you may remember that there was an enormous amount of excitement about the MRP model that was going to be published by YouGov, which had made such an enormous difference in the 2017 campaign. We were all waiting with bated breath to get the result of the election, as it was seen then. In many respects, the polls this time did better than the MRP model. The MRP model was showing things moving to a closer outcome than was the actual result. In some ways, that fed into the sense that the national vote shares were misleading because of tactical voting. That was part of why we were surprised when we probably should not have been.

Q4 **Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve:** The Select Committee was quite concerned about the manipulation of political information on social media platforms. The Government responded that they were conducting research to inform their policy, which would focus on education, technology, communication and ensuring the right regulation. Here we are, two and a half years later, the problems are, if anything, more acute. Do the polls have anything to contribute to this problem? Is there anything the polling organisations can do?

Professor Stephen Fisher: The Select Committee is right to be concerned, but I find it hard to imagine the Government solving this problem without radical restrictions to freedom of speech, so I do not have a clear picture as to what ought to be done. The polls play an important part here by providing, I would hope, relatively reliable estimates of public opinion that can be used to confirm or contradict lots of conjectures that are out there in social media. One person who is particularly active is Chris Curtis from YouGov. He tweets a lot about how YouGov polls do or do not confirm rumours that are going round on Twitter. The things that people like him do are very useful, because the information the pollsters provide is usually much, much better than the other contradicting information that is doing the rounds.

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I agree. I am a methodologist, so I would be going outside my area of academic expertise if I were to speak too confidently about political misinformation on the internet, albeit that it is an area I find interesting and follow. I am of the same view as Steve. The polls here generally play a useful corrective role. If well conducted and presented by authoritative, trusted figures, they are very useful to combat misinformation, if there is a rumour that X or Y is happening. This includes not just immediate snap polls of the YouGov kind but academics contributing more considered analysis of electoral dynamics and so on. That is my experience of it.

One question, though, is what sort of cut-through that has to the broader population outside the immediate bubble of people like me who are interested in politics and engaged with that community of practice. It is more than possible that my experience of it is not very widespread and

that that corrective aspect of the polls is weaker than we would want it to be.

Q5 Lord Rennard: I should declare that I employed polling organisations some years ago to help in election campaigns. They occasionally pay me small amounts of money now for my opinions.

I would like to address two areas in questioning, the first being publication of opinion polls. In Committee deliberations, we came to the conclusion that there was no grand conspiracy by polling organisations or any particular polling organisation to manipulate public opinion as opposed to investigating and reporting it.

The big concern about polling that many Members expressed was over the manner in which they were published. Occasionally, there were suggestions that the source of funding for a particular poll led to some influence over the way questions were posed or the ordering of questions, which can influence the outcome. The Committee concluded that the Electoral Commission could play a role in publishing the basic data and the sources of funding. The government response rejected that.

Who might be the authoritative source for publishing those sorts of things, if not the Electoral Commission? Those of us following politics in the United States at the moment use a website, RealClearPolitics, which I find to be very good at giving you a quick snapshot of where all the key polls are. You can monitor it and trust it as a source of reporting for polls. Could we perhaps have something like that in the UK? If not the Electoral Commission, who?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I have never been in favour of regulation of the polling industry. The Committee's report sets out very nicely the arguments for and against a stronger regulatory approach. Reading that, as I did again yesterday, convinces me that it is a Procrustean approach. Most of the problems we see here are at the margins. A much stronger regulatory hand on this would have many disadvantages—stifling innovation, potentially suppressing free speech and causing a whole set of problems.

The problems, in so far as we identify them, with funding and the use of polls as political manipulation are generally quite rare. If you want to manipulate public opinion, it is not obvious how you would do it through a vote intention poll. The report makes a very useful distinction between different kinds of polls. Up to now we have mostly been talking about vote intention polls, but pollsters also do work in policy areas and controversial areas of public opinion, and those tend to stir up problems with question wording—a lobby group will fund a poll that surprisingly shows the public are very much in favour of what it is lobbying for, and so on.

My sense is that regulation is not the best way to stop that. It comes back to this point about critical engagement with the research that is being presented, rather than trying to regulate it out. These days, the polling industry is much, much bigger than it used to be in the UK. The number of

polls being done is vastly greater than 10, 20 or 30 years ago, partly because of the internet and the lower costs to entry.

That gives it the advantage of being nimble and able to get quick snapshots of public opinion when we want them. Who did well in that debate? What do we think of this current controversy over free school meals? We want to get that information quickly. Anything that requires registration and filling in forms is a Procrustean approach to dealing with the rare, and generally smaller, problems that we identify.

Professor Stephen Fisher: On the question of where we get the polls from, a number of websites put up opinion polls. They include Wikipedia, which tends to be pretty much right, even though you would never want to rely on or trust it. If an organisation is going to post opinion poll results systematically, I suspect it should be the British Polling Council. It does a very good job of industry self-regulation, in my view.

On the issue of question wording and the order of questions, the standard tables that the British Polling Council requires pollsters to produce are very helpful. They nearly always present the questions in the order in which they were asked on the poll. I know that sometimes they just present the published question and not the question beforehand, and sometimes the order of the tables is out, with the vote intention one first, because that is what people are most interested in.

You could ask the British Polling Council to consider requiring the standard tables to include a list of all the questions asked on the poll and the order in which they were asked, if that was important to you. I think it is important. Priming effects are well known in the survey research literature. You want to be sensitive to the fact that polls often include questions from multiple clients. What matters for priming is normally the first couple of questions immediately before the question of interest, not all the questions in an opinion poll. I hope that has addressed all the aspects of the question.

Lord Rennard: I want to come back to the second half of my question. We are still talking about the way in which opinion poll information is published. Some newspapers may be less reliable sources than others for publishing what happens in a poll. One newspaper may report a poll showing a huge surge to a party, and another may report the same poll as showing terribly disappointing results for that party.

Whatever happens in the newspaper industry, it is not as bad as can happen in social media. We were concerned about the social media reporting of polls and other issues. We raised the issue of the need for digital imprints on anything published on social media. The Government have a consultation about this very issue at the moment. It closes on 4 November.

I would like to ask our experts about a particular aspect of that consultation. On imprinting social media posts, it says that the imprint must be located so that it is displayed as part of the material, where that is reasonably practical. It seems to me that those are slightly weasel words.

If you want to identify the source of something on social media—we knew it in the olden days of political leaflets as the name and address of the agent and the publisher—putting it on something wherever it is reasonably practical is probably not good enough.

Would this issue, which we addressed in the Committee, be better addressed if, rather than saying “wherever reasonably practical”, it had to appear prominently and visibly either on what was published or on the source publishing it, so that the social media account publishing the information at least had to identify the exact source?

Lord Lipsey: This is slightly separate from our main focus on opinion polls today, but would either of our witnesses like to comment on Lord Rennard’s excellent point?

Professor Stephen Fisher: I share those concerns, largely. I took a look at the consultation paper. For me, one test is whether it would prevent a political party press office presenting itself as a fact-checking organisation, and it would not, as far as I can see. I also noticed that under proposal 4 there is quite a wide get-out clause for where this digital imprint should be. Saying that it would be in the bio or the “about” section of a social media page or website that you have to click through to just does not cut the mustard.

People are looking at this kind of information and these images on their phones in streams of Twitter or Facebook posts. They will see the visually striking stuff and very, very rarely, if ever, click through, never mind look in detail at exactly what the Twitter handle says as opposed to what the branding is.

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I absolutely agree with that. The function of the digital imprint system is not just to enable members of the public to trust the source of the information, although that is part of it; it is to prevent actors doing things that they might be scrutinised for, although perhaps not by an average member of the public. Being caught out not abiding by the rules might be a deterrent to that sort of action.

Q6 Lord Lang of Monkton: It may reveal ignorance, but a subject that does not seem to have preoccupied you, as your inquiry has progressed, is the basic question asked of the public. Is there a distinction made and have you identified differences between doorstep questioning, city centre questioning and telephone questioning? Is the question a direct one: “How are you going to vote?” Do you use build-ups? What is the development there and how do you analyse the relative differences?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: Nowadays there is no longer any face-to-face interviewing, certainly for vote intention polls. The vast majority of such polls are done online. There are still some pollsters who use telephone interviewing, but my guesstimate is that something in the region of 90% of election polls in this country are done online now.

The questions asked are pretty standard. In our inquiry, we looked at whether the order of the questions and exactly how the question about

vote intention is asked make much difference. The answer was that it does not make a lot of difference. There are some differences in how that question is asked. For example, the list might be limited to the parties standing in a constituency or an adjustment might be made for people who have already voted by post, who might be filtered to be asked about whether they are going to vote and so on. In general, the answers people give to vote intention questions online seem to be fairly robust to those minor variations.

Professor Stephen Fisher: I agree with Patrick. From my perspective, there seems to be an interesting development in variation between online opinion pollsters in how they collect their respondents. Some pollsters build up panels of respondents who they keep re-interviewing; YouGov most notably but also Opinium. Others use what is known as river sampling, where they interview people whose contact details they have obtained through commercial schemes where people have logged on to public wi-fi or somehow had their information harvested.

There is variation between online pollsters in the kinds of samples they are picking up. I would like to see an academic and practitioner debate about the relative merits and defects of these different online sampling methods.

Q7 Lord Lipsey: Could I ask a question about America? The pollsters whose heads are the block at the moment are not the British pollsters, who had a triumph in 2019, but the American pollsters. There is a widespread perception that they got it wrong last time when they said Hillary would win and she did not. Actually, the polls were not that far out; they gave Hillary on average a 4% lead and on the night she had a lead of nearly 2%. Through the arcane workings of the American Electoral College, Trump emerged as President.

There have been a vast number of polls in America. Do you have any observations on their sophistication? Have they changed since the perceived errors of 2016? Has the reporting of polls in America been more sophisticated than in the UK?

Professor Stephen Fisher: I share your analysis. There has been learning. One of the key findings from the American Association for Public Opinion Research report was that some state-level polls, particularly Wisconsin, failed because they did not weight by education, which we discussed earlier. That is a very powerful predictor of voting behaviour on both sides of the Atlantic now. My understanding is that many, if not all, of the polls in the US are now weighting by education. There have been some interesting reports about how, if they were not weighting by education, the lead for Joe Biden would be even bigger than they are publishing at the moment.

Going back to what I said earlier about media coverage in Britain in 2019, the emphasis is on the downside risk for, in this case, the Democrats of the polling error being the same as at the last election. There is not enough talk in the US of the possibility that the polls are wrong in the opposite direction—that Joe Biden might be heading for an enormous victory and

that the Democrats more broadly might be heading for a landslide. To clarify, I am not predicting that outcome. I would still go with the average of the polls and good forecasters like Nate Silver at FiveThirtyEight as leading my main expectations.

Professor Patrick Sturgis: I very much agree with that. I like to tease the people who did the American polling inquiry that their job was much easier than ours, because their pollsters actually got the answer right, at least at the national level. In so far as there were problems, it was in the swing states and the Electoral College. Polling at constituency level is not quite as difficult as in the UK, but it is harder to do polling at state level for various reasons, and there is not as much money going into that sort of thing.

I strongly suspect that the lessons from 2016 will largely have been learned. The risk of that sort of error happening again is lower. To reinforce what Stephen said, we probably have the same thing that we had in 2019 of people worrying about making the same mistake as last time, being overcautious and underpricing the possibility of a Biden landslide.

On regulation, I do not think there is much for us to learn. They are quite similar systems, but there is a much, much bigger industry in the US. The American Association for Public Opinion Research runs something called the transparency initiative, which is very similar to what the BBC does. It relies on disclosure rather than assessing or guaranteeing quality; there is voluntary sign-up and so on. Although there are very different landscapes, the systems are broadly similar.

The methodologies in the US have always had much more of an emphasis on random sampling, for reasons I will not really go into now—they are too boring and detailed—but that is probably changing a bit. Whereas in the UK we have always used quota sampling, and we still do, now we are seeing more of that going on in the US for cost and speed reasons.

As Steve mentioned, the statistical modellers dominate the media airwaves on this. We get Nate Silver or the *Economist* giving an updated probability every day. There is a debate about those probabilities and how people interpret them. They are both showing around a 90% probability of a Biden presidency now. People are going to interpret that as an almost certain event, but if you were told that, in crossing a road, you had a 10% chance of being hit by a bus, you probably would not cross the road. To sum up, we in the UK do not have a great deal to learn from either the methods or the regulation, partly because we take quite similar approaches.

Q8 **Baroness Walmsley:** A lot of the commentators on the US are talking about shy Trump voters—in other words, people who will not admit to their intention to vote for Trump. This might be skewing the polls. Have you noticed the same phenomenon in the UK? Do you have any techniques for dealing with it to improve the accuracy of polls?

Professor Patrick Sturgis: We looked at this in our 2015 inquiry report. My own view is that the attention that the shy phenomenon gets vastly

outweighs its actual contribution to polling errors. For some reason, it is a very appealing explanation to people. The actual empirical evidence for it in any context is very light. Particularly now the vast majority of polls are completed by people on a webpage and there is no other human involved, it is not at all obvious why you would agree to do a survey about who you are going to vote for in an election and then lie to a webpage.

Lord Lipsey: Thanks to everybody's extraordinary crispness, we have come to the end of the session. I thought it was excellent, and I thank the two witnesses for being so clear and for educating the Committee as we went. I hope that the next witnesses, from the British Polling Council and the Market Research Society, were listening and will put a link to a full transcript on their websites, because it would be extraordinarily educational to those of us who are students.

To me, the most extraordinary thing about the American election is that, if you want to have a bet on Joe Biden now, he is 2:1 on. You have to put £2 on to win £1. He has been near to even money for a great deal of the campaign, but according to all the experts who study the polls he is probably about an 8:1 or 10:1 on shot. I have taken advantage of this anomaly by placing, by a factor of 20, the largest bet of my life on Joe Biden. Anyway, I thank the witnesses again and I thank the Committee for their excellent questions.