Figure 8.15c. SURVEY SAMPLING: Poll Answers as Misinformation

EM9214: The Globe and Mail, September 5, 1992, page B6

Support for NAFTA growing, poll says

46 per cent say they favour deal

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OTTAWA – Public support for North American free trade has risen following the tentative agreement among Canada, the United States and Mexico, according to an opinion poll done for the federal government.

The survey, released yesterday, shows 46 per cent of Canadians questioned support NAFTA, while 48 per cent oppose the deal.

The survey of 1,500 people by Angus Reid Group was done Aug. 17-21, about one week after International Trade Minister Michael Wilson signed the deal with his U.S. and Mexican counterparts. The poll is said to be accurate within 2.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Angus Reid did a similar survey for the federal government in March and found 29 per cent support for NAFTA, compared with 67 per cent opposed.

In the March poll, public support for the existing free-trade pact with the United States was 37 per cent. In the poll released yesterday, support for the deal had risen to 45 per cent.

Federal officials say they paid close attention to opinion polling about NAFTA in the months leading up to the Aug. 12 tentative deal. Areas of particular public concern, such as protecting cultural industries from foreign influence, were made critical issues for Canadian negotiators at the bargaining table.

As well, Mr. Wilson has repeatedly argued both before and after the agreement that NAFTA will open the booming Mexican market to Canadian products.

Opinion poll results have shown that many Canadians would be swayed into supporting NAFTA if it was evident that the trade deal provides an opportunity for Canadian exporters.

Depite the low level of support for NAFTA in the March poll, 79 per cent of those surveyed felt it was important for the federal government to be at the negotiating table to protect Canadian interests. Federal officials believe this poll result is directly related to the increased support for NAFTA after the signing of the actual deal.

"A lot of those people were skeptical about what the outcome might be," said a senior federal official yesterday. "But now that they begin to see what the outcome looks like, they are probably concluding that maybe it's not so bad."

The official said the 800-page legal text of the three-way trade deal will be completed in late September but an interim document probably will be released Tuesday.

The prolonged period of legal drafting has been a result of the complexity of the issues, he said, and not because the negotiating teams are trying to win concessions on key matters.

"Frankly, the work has gone more smoothly than I thought likely at the time we reached agreement in mid-August," said the official, who briefed reporters on condition he not be identified.

"In a technical sense, negotiations are still continuing, but it is very much a technical process. It is not a substantive negotiation. It is not reopening anything."

But a trade analyst said yesterday that more is going on than that. In areas such as government procurement, services and clothing, he said, differences exist that were papered over before last month's tentative agreement.

"The lawyers are trying to decide which formulation is best and, in doing so, are negotiating the details of the deal," he said. "The heart of the agreement is in the details. They won't change the principles, but they may change the balance and the impact."

Since the tentative deal was signed, some analysts have expressed concern that NAFTA will be the basis of a trading bloc that favours home-grown companies, to the detriment of competitors in Asia or Europe.

Press reports have suggested the Japanese government will make clear its concerns about NAFTA at a meeting of Pacific Rim countries next week.

Japanese officials have suggested that aspects of the auto provisions may violate international trade regulations. Other Asian countries are concerned that Mexico will replace them as key suppliers of clothing and electrical products to the United States.

EM9215: The Toronto Star, September 5, 1992, page A12

Trade deal 'dangerous', 65% say

OTTAWA (Special) – A clear majority of Canadians believe the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade deal will put Canada in "a more dangerous position," an Angus Reid-Southam News poll shows.

Sixty-five per cent of repondents to the poll by the Winnipeg-based research firm said the new pact is dangerous because Canadians will have to compete against low-wage Mexican workers.

Only 29 per cent accepted the federal government's view that the three-country deal improves the Canada-U.S. free-trade agreement by clarifying trade rules and opening the Mexican market.

Of Ontario respondents, 54 per cent expressed opposition to the deal, while 39 per cent said they supported it. Seven per cent of Ontarians polled said they were undecided.

But while a large number of Canadians are worried about the deal's trouble-making potential, opinion about what to do now is more mixed.

Nationally, 53 per cent don't want the government to go ahead, while 41 per cent said they favour entering into the broader pact.

Following a longstanding trend on free trade, residents of British Columbia and the Atlantic provinces are the most opposed, while Albertans and Quebecers are divided on the quesion.

There's been little change in overall opposition from March, when the same question was asked in an Angus Reid-Southam News survey. Then, 64 per cent opposed the three-way deal while 31 per cent liked the idea.

And although most respondents think the new plan is "dangerous," they didn't offer a clear consensus on its long-term economic impact.

Just 43 per cent thought it would hurt the economy in the long run while 24 per cent see it bringing improvement; 27 per cent predicted it will be a wash in the end.

(*continued overleaf*)

The poll suggests that much of the opposition stems from a lack of trust in the Mulroney government to hammer out a good agreement.

When asked to ignore the plan unveiled last month, 59 per cent of those telephoned said they generally support the idea of North American free trade. Again, ignoring the current proposal, only 38 per cent oppose the concept.

The telephone survey of 1,500 adults Aug. 25-31 is considered accurate within 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

SOUTHAM NEWS

1 In *The Globe and Mail* (page Dl) on September 11, 1992, columnist Rick Salutin made the following comments about the two poll reports EM9214 and EM9215 reprinted overleaf on page 8.87 and above, under the heading, *Polls are not as reliable as eavesdropping or calling mom, but they're good for a laugh*:

There was a stunning case of polling humour just last Saturday. A Report on Business story in *The Globe* was titled, "Support for NAFTA growing, poll says," with the subhead, "46% say they favour deal." That same day a Southam News story in *The Toronto Star* was headed, "Trade deal 'dangerous', 65% say." This one gets better. It turns out that the same pollster, Angus Reid, is quoted in both stories.

If you really stare at these two articles for a while, you realize Reid did two different polls on the same subject – the North American trade deal – for two separate clients: the federal government and Southam News; and came up with different answers to similar questions. For instance his Southam poll found "little change in overall opposition from March," when 64 per cent were opposed. But for his government poll, Reid found a big hike in support from that same month of March, when opposition stood even higher, at 67 per cent. For Southam, Reid found 53 per cent against the deal and 41 per cent in favour; for the feds, he found 46 per cent in favour and only 48 per cent against – though farther down, the ROB story says support was just 45 per cent and no matter how long I stare I can't unravel that. The polls were done about a week apart, which might explain something, if you could figure out what. They both queried 1,500 people, but Reid's Southam poll is said to be accurate within 2.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20 and his government poll only within 2.6. The comics, eh?

- Describe carefully the different *comparisons* between the polls that underlie Mr. Salutin's comments.
- Outline what can reasonably be inferred from the two articles EM9214 and EM9215 reprinted above and overleaf on page 8.87 about the *question(s)* asked in the two polls.
  - Referring to *The Toronto Star* article, what do you infer was the source of the word *dangerous* in people's responses? Explain briefly.
  - If you were the author of either article, how would you respond to criticism that you should have given the actual question *wording(s)* in your article?
- Indicate briefly what you consider to be the likely contribution to the debate of the differences in the date and the length of the data collection phase of the two polls.
- Give an explicit calculation which shows how the 'accuracy' figures of 2.5 and 2.6 percentage points are obtained. Then discuss critically what you infer Mr. Salutin's comments indicate about his interpretation of:
  - the fact that the figures differ by one-tenth of a percentage point;
  - the word *accuracy* in this context.

2 Based both on your answers to the matters raised in the previous Question 1 and on other relevant considerations, outline:
- the statistical issues involved in Mr. Salutin's comments;
- the extent to which his concerns can be resolved using of the available information;
- the (statistical) responsibilities of a journalist reporting poll results.

3 In light of your answers to the questions above, explain briefly how you would allocate responsibility for the dilemmas facing statistically informed readers of the two poll reports EM9214 and EM9215 among three sources:
- the nature of polls themselves,
- the particular pollster in this instance,
- the two authors of the newspaper reports.

4 Mr. Salutin concludes his column (cited in Question 1 above) with the following comments:

Of course, there are problems with polling. It seems to me, for instance, that polls basically bolster the status quo because they concentrate on how people are rather than what they could become. They tend to treat us as fixed repositories of set attitudes rather than active participants able to change through informed debate and thought. In other words, while they may be fun, polls are (a) useless, or (b) dangerous. Sorry, you have no other choices and no, you cannot tell us how you would go about thinking through the issues we have decided to examine you on.

- Outline a statistician's response to these remarks.

The articles EM9214 and EM9215 reprinted in this Figure 8.15c are also used in Figure 2.8c in the STAT 332 Course Materials and in Statistical Highlight #81.