YouGov: Political and Social Research

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Introduction

YouGov is a polling and market research company, that has made its name in recent years for its often groundbreaking political and social affairs polls. During my time at YouGov's London office, I was embedded with the Politics and Social Research team, often working on confidential projects. Therefore, I will focus on one of my main tasks during my placement; "daily polling."

Objectives

YouGov's "daily poll" is conducted several times per week and aims to provide cleaned and analysed results within a single day, hence its name. Each poll is sent out to a nationally representative sample of 1,500 people, and contain some standard internal questions, alongside any other questions that are requested by high-profile clients, such as news outlets or government departments.

The survey I will be using as an example to discuss was provided to The Times, and contained questions about voting intention, who the respondent thought would make the best prime minister, and what issues facing the country respondents considered the most important.

Method

Before the survey can be sent out, the questions need to be written. The scripting process was undertaken on an internal software, called Gryphon. It is a html-based program which allows the scripter to ask questions in a variety of formats, including the option to split the sample and ask different questions to different groups of respondents. The most important element of the scripting process is ensuring that each question is clear, concise, and as unbiased as possible. These questions are then sent to 1,500 people, who are selected from YouGov's larger panel to ensure they are nationally representative based on characteristics such as their age, sex, education level, and how they voted in previous elections. This stratified sampling method means that a relatively small sample of 1,500 people is sufficient to ensure the data is accurate to within a reasonable margin of error.

Several hours after the survey has been sent out, the data from the respondents was downloaded into SPSS, where I was then responsible for cleaning and weighting the data. The purpose of re-weighting the data after the respondents have provided their answers is to allow us to adjust the weighting of certain under-represented groups that are often hard to reach through online surveys. The data was then cleaned, and sent to Excel to be presented in a clear and professional table, which was then sent to the client, and made public on YouGov's own website.

Results and Conclusions

The survey that I am using as an example was conducted on the 29-30th July, which was not long after Boris Johnson took over as prime minister. The survey therefore threw up some interesting results. The poll showed that the Conservative Party had a ten-point lead over the Labour Party, with both parties suffering historically low levels of support. Boris Johnson was continuing to experience his so-called "Boris Bounce", with high personal favourability ratings, and 42% of respondents preferring him to Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister. For this question, it was also interesting
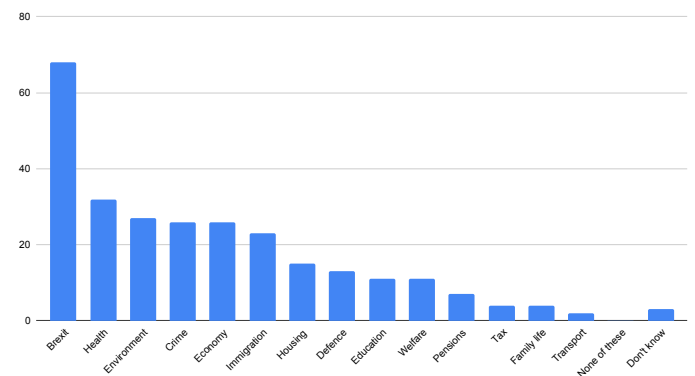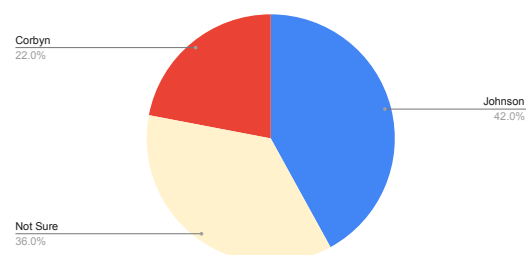

Graph showing the results from one of the survey questions, asking what issue respondents thought was the most important facing the country. Respondents could select up to three issues.

to note that more people responded that they were "not sure" who would make a better prime minister than the number of people who would have preferred to see Jeremy Corbyn in the position. The results also showed that, while Brexit remained the issue that most people considered the most important facing the country, issues such as Climate Change have risen up the agenda. This was most likely connected to Extinction Rebellion's ongoing protests in London at the time. The poll was therefore an interesting snapshot into the minds of the public at what was quite a politically tumultuous time, with significant upheaval.

Key Skills Learnt

I have learned a great deal as a result of my placement at YouGov. Before I arrived, I knew very little about the process of data cleaning and analysis, and even less about survey coding. Now, I am confidently able to use data analysis tools, such as SPSS, and am significantly more comfortable with HTML coding, even if I still require a lot of practice in this area. Although it as not a part of my placement, the team made sure to give me a wider range of skills and experiences, and so I also feel I have a much greater understanding of how to write and draft survey questions that are unbiased and appropriate to be sent out.

Graph showing the results from one of the survey questions, asking who respondents thought would make the best Prime Minister out of Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn..