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Only One Poll Shows Trump Leading. I Interviewed The Poll's Director

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Poll after poll show Joe Biden as heavy favorite - despite him not knowing what state he was in when campaigning here in Las Vegas last week, and him mistakenly saying he's running for Senate. While the Real Clear Politics average has Biden up 10 points, Donald Trump's betting odds have taken a dive. After a peak of 48%, Bovada LV has Orange Man underdogging it at 35% - Biden -200, Trump +170. The Real Clear Politics average sits at 32.5%.

But not all is as it seems, according to Patrick Basham, polling director at the Democracy Institute. The Democracy Institute is a relative newcomer to political polling - but it correctly forecast Brexit and Trump's historic 2016 upset. Basham's latest poll has Trump up 46% to 45%, and up four points in the critical battleground states. I asked Basham why his poll looks so different than the others - and why it's getting so little mainstream media play.

JIM ROSSI: True or False: We're in the midst of the biggest American voter shift since at least 1964, and most pollsters cannot or are not measuring it.

PATRICK BASHAM: Partly false and partly true. It's something of a shift, but not so much historic as an evolution of 2016. The part that is undoubtedly true is that most of the polls are misleading their readers into thinking the election is a done deal.

JIM: Are polls actively misleading people - or simply not able to measure what's happening?

PATRICK: They're not mutually exclusive. Some polls may just be off, some are advancing an agenda, and there is an intertwining of the two. In my opinion, there is a misreading of the electorate, based on many assumptions that are not likely accurate.

Polling is supposed to be incredibly scientific, and the science is more advanced than ever. But polling has always been a synthesis of science and art – and polls are more art than science in 2020. One of the major challenges is figuring out how the electorate will look.

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JIM: What are some of those assumptions?

PATRICK: With most of the mainstream polls – *New York Times,* CNN, the university polls – a fundamental assumption is that the electorate – aka turnout – will be much, much larger than 2016. 10-30 million more, that's 25-30% larger. That makes it essential that polls capture many, many more Democrat voters.

JIM: How is the Democracy Institute poll different?

PATRICK: Two key ways – turnout and estimating shy Trump voters or secret Trump voters. The Democracy Institute - along with Zogby and Trafalgar Group – those of us who find a very competitive race see turnout very similar to 2016.

JIM: You work with the libertarian Cato Institute. Most if not all major polls have affiliations with media companies, think tanks, and universities.

PATRICK: Now you have the issue of agendas. It appears today that many corporations and media outlets clearly have a horse in this race and show their candidate to be well ahead. Certain reward for a certain outcome.

JIM: You mention a couple examples.

PATRICK: ORC - Opinion Research Corportation - got fired by CNN after the 2016 election. Their main transgression was that they were pretty accurate.

JIM: Coming from CNN, that doesn't surprise me.

PATRICK: The USC poll - University of Southern California - repeatedly asks the same respondents 2 or 3 questions daily…

JIM: Like a cross between a poll and a focus group?

PATRICK: …and it showed Trump competitive in 2016. In late September 2020, it was showing Biden's lead evaporate. They claimed "technical problems" and changed their methodology. They are underpolling GOP voters.

JIM: Let me ask about secret Trump voters aka shy Trump voters. In today's "woke" "cancel culture," people risk social ostracism, job loss, mob intimidation and outright violence. Bettors on the underdog see an edge here. Can we measure these voters?

PATRICK: How I come at this is, Democracy Institute's first public foray into public polling was Brexit. We got it correct – within one percentage point (4% - actual result vs. 3% - our projected result). The reason why we got it right – maybe the only reason – is we believed there were shy Brexit voters. So we devised questions to find out, then applied that to the US election in 2016. We discovered shy Trump voters – a few percentage points, low single digits – but significant in a close race.

Now we come to 2020, and a lot of people are looking. What we found is they do exist and in greater numbers. Our questions go like this: 'If you were a Trump voter, would you tell anybody? Would you tell family? A friend? A coworker? Would you put a sign on your lawn or your car?'

JIM: In 2016, Trump outperformed the Real Clear Politics average for battleground states by four points. Is that a good over/under for 2020?

PATRICK: I'd advise you to take the over. Nationally - and this is probably conservative, we see it at 5 to 6%. State by state, where the rubber hits the road in the Electoral College, it varies more. We estimate more in battleground states…

JIM: Some of these are *literally* battleground states – as people argue and in some cases engage in violence.

PATRICK: Very crudely stated, we see three types of shy Trump voters. First is the blue-collar, middle aged white male in the rural Midwest. He is more busy than afraid to tell you. Second is the white suburban female. Third are African-American and Hispanic voters. They are moving toward Trump in significant, maybe even historic numbers.

JIM: In my experience, people don't easily change their political views. But two things can change that: serious economic risks and physical danger.

PATRICK: The #1 predictor of voting Republican is owning a handgun. Black female gun ownership has skyrocketed. Forty percent of new handgun owners are female; sixty percent are African American.

JIM: How has the media covered your poll? Let me put it another way: *Has* the media covered your poll, with the exception of the UK *Sunday Express* and Breitbart? At absolute minimum, it seems very 'man bites dog' and a juicy story.

PATRICK: If we lived in a media world today like we used to, or a media world we wish it to be, you'd assume our 'man bites dog' story is at least newsworthy. We were getting some attention with our monthly poll. Then two months ago, our September poll showed Trump up 48-45 nationally and up 49-42 in battleground states. Trump started tweeting about it.

Then when the October poll came out, Trump was in the hospital with COVID-19. Our poll was the only thing he tweeted about that day. We got hate mail and personal attacks on a scale that was hard to encounter. How we produced the numbers was not challenged, just that we produced numbers others don't like. We've gone from having the most media-ignored poll to the most infamous poll.

JIM: Do Real Clear Politics or CNN have any objective criteria for being included in their reporting?

PATRICK: Real Clear Politics has no hard-and-fast rules. CNN said, 'We don't meet their standards.' I agree. We tend to be accurate. They simply don't want a counter-narrative.

JIM: How about FiveThirtyEight?

PATRICK: Most of the polls they have the highest rated are the ones with the worst record in recent years.

JIM: Unlike pundits, bettors benefit from accurate information, not polemics. People often say, 'The only poll that counts is in November.' I wrote a book about fraud. I think mass-mail voting brings profound election fraud risks. These polls, to me, are shaping the narrative of how the election is *supposed* to go. Some bettors worry the game is fixed.

PATRICK: If you came from another planet and looked at <u>every single line of tangible evidence except polling</u> – just about every one of those metrics point to Trump.

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JIM: Let's finish by digging deeper on the secret Trump voter. Trump, in my opinion, has been under greater continuous stress, even before inauguration, since any president since at least FDR. Politics aside, I see some people feeling sympathy - or at least grudging respect, like a prizefighter who just won't go down.

PATRICK: Here's one reason people respect him: Unlike so many politicians, Trump has tried to keep his promises – even unpopular ones.

JIM: Could there be people out there who won't know they're voting for Trump until they're in the booth, or filling out their ballot?

PATRICK: A percentage of undecided voters not only haven't told others – they haven't told themselves. How can anyone say with certainty what the precise number will be?