

The election eye...

The political polls — view them with care

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Political polls, especially those taken in Idaho, are only as good as those who conduct them, and politicians and voters had better view them with considerable reservations.

Really, they are sort of a game which furnish entertainment but taking them too seriously can be disastrous as many candidates and their supporters have discovered.

Most pollsters admit to an error of 3 or 4 percent, or thereabouts, but 10 and 15 percent is more like it, if past results are a criterion.

Most veteran political observers and followers can do that well, and they don't need polls to tell them.

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The latest poll of the Idaho Daily Stateman in Boise, taken by telephone of 820 persons at random, is virtually worthless, except it does give a broad indication of the Idaho races. Furthermore, what may be true this week can be drastically changed in another week or two.

Those polls conducted professionally, face-to-face instead of by telephone, by Harris and Gallup, for example, have been generally accurate on the national scale. Their main weakness is the fact they are good for that day or week only.

The Harris and Gallup polls, for example, a year ago had Sen. Ted Kennedy far ahead of Carter, Reagan and all other presidential contenders. When the campaign got down to the nitty-gritty, Kennedy faded like a wet paper sack.

Telephone polls taken hurriedly by television networks and papers after a major development also must be taken with a grain of salt.

Only six months ago, Reagan held what appeared to be a safe 25 percentage point lead over Carter; now, the polls show them about even, and, in fact, give Carter the edge.

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The Boise newspaper poll merely confirmed that the senatorial race between Democrat Frank Church and Republican Steve Symms is tight as two sides of a paper. The congressional contests heavily favor the Republicans, U.S. Rep. George V. Hansen over Democrat Diane Bilyeu in the 2nd District and Republican Larry Craig over Democrat Glenn Nichols in the 1st District.

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This poll gave Church 42 percent, Symms 39 percent, Libertarian Larry Fulmer 1 percent and 17 percent undecided.

Craig led Nichols 33-15 percent, with a whopping 52 percent undecided, and Hansen topped Mrs. Bilyeu 41-24 percent with 35 percent undecided.

It's no surprise that Reagan leads President Carter 48-18 percent, with John Anderson at 8, and 24 percent undecided.

The Statesman poll, however, carries a number of glaring deficiencies. It shows Church ahead 1.1 percent in North Idaho, 4 percent in Southwest Idaho and 1.5 percent in East Idaho. This totals 6.6 percent, which divided by 3 gives Church a 2.2 percent lead. But most misleading is the Church edge of 4 percent in Southwest Idaho, which has far more population than the two other sections of the state; and, in fact, may be nearly half. On this basis, it would stretch Church's margin, if that is any solace to the Church supporters.

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The Idaho Poll conducted by Howard Schrag, of the Boise-based Professional Research Group was more accurate, but it

also contained many errors. Schrag last summer moved to Tacoma, where he felt his polling expertise would be more lucrative.

The Statesman poll has been erroneous in many cases in the past, and people should realize this in sizing the present standings.

For example, the newspaper poll was wrong in saying in recent elections the 1 percent Tax Initiative would lose, that the Hansen-Stan Kress race in

1978 was too close to call (Hansen won handily), that Democrat Lt. Gov. Bill Murphy would beat Republican Phil Batt and that Jerry Evans would beat Roy Truby for school superintendent by more than 59 percent.

Various polls give food for thought, but the only one that really counts is on general election day, Nov. 4 and it can be said now that many of those standings given today will appear ludicrous after election day.