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Former Gallup Pollster And Founder Of UNH Survey Center Unveils Secrets And Shams Of Political Polls In New Book

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DURHAM, N.H. -- In the 13 years David Moore worked for the Gallup Poll, he learned that media polls are not used to uncover the "will" or thoughts of the public, but rather to manufacture a "public opinion" that grabs the attention of journalists and can be used to fill media news holes.

Now the founder of the University of New Hampshire Survey Center and former managing editor of the Gallup Poll draws on first-hand experience as well as the history of modern media polling practices - focusing particularly on the four most influential polls: *New York Times/CBS News*, *Washington Post/ABC News*, *Pew Research*, and *USA Today/Gallup* to reveal the inner-workings of pollsters and the cycle of bias that tends to promote the powerful and suppress dissent in his new book "The Opinion Makers: An Insider Exposes the Truth Behind the Polls."

The book, published by Beacon Press, is available in bookstores now.

According to Moore, in the fall of 2007, media pollsters reported a solid lead for Hillary Clinton among Democratic primary candidates and crowned Rudy Giuliani the national Republican frontrunner. Clinton's lead evaporated in the first contest and Giuliani later dropped out of the race without having won a single delegate.

"Early in the campaign season, pollsters refused to report the simple truth - that the election was wide open. It makes for better headlines to pretend that there are front-runners and under-dogs. They love to show a wildly fluctuating electorate rather than to reflect a far less interesting reality - that months before an election many voters are undecided," Moore says.

"Media pollsters will do everything they can to beat such an undecided voter into oblivion, so they can begin horserace coverage long before the race track has even opened," he says.

Analyzing pollsters' problematic methodology, such as shrinking and skewed samples (for example, the difficulty of reaching a broad base of people on landline phones) and "forced-choice format" in which respondents are forced to pick an answer even if they don't know or don't have a strong opinion, Moore reveals how polls distort voters' election preferences as well as the public's support for or opposition to government policies. The net result, he says, is that polls give false readings of which candidates voters prefer and what the public wants,

which ultimately determines the democratic process.

In his new book, Moore shows how polls create a "legitimacy spin cycle." Those in power frame an issue to favor their position, while the press limits its coverage of sources that might disagree with the administration. Pollsters, in turn, develop surveys to dovetail with the news stories and the people - many of whom have little idea of what is happening beyond the limited information presented to them by the news media - are pressured into answering questions that reinforce the original position of those in power.

Furthermore, the manipulation of voter preferences in pre-election polls misleads politicians, the public, and journalists into believing that voters have made up their minds months - even years - ahead of the election. Moore analyzes the polling failures from 2008 presidential primary contests - including the New Hampshire debacle in which 11 different polls forecast a solid win by Sen. Barack Obama; instead, Hillary Clinton took the Granite State and recharged her candidacy.

His analysis underscores how early national polling of the electorate actually reveals nothing about the dynamics of what is a state-by-state nomination contest. "Even though most in the media know they shouldn't use national polls as primary contest predictors, many do, often negatively affecting lesser known candidates' ability to raise money, attract volunteers, obtain media coverage, and in the end, stay in the race," Moore says.

Moore calls for polling reforms, including ending reliance on fictitious national primaries, measuring and reporting the percentage of undecided voters and the intensity of respondents' opinions, and recognizing bias in question wording and question order.

"Eventually, the many conflicting and nonsensical results should shame pollsters and the news media into reform. Only if that happens will polls achieve their ideal role in the democratic process - telling the truth about the public, warts and all," he says.

Moore is the founder and former director of the UNH Survey Center. He currently is a senior fellow with the UNH Carsey Institute. He is a former vice president of the Gallup Organization and managing editor of the Gallup Poll, where he worked from 1993 until 2006. Prior to joining Gallup, he was a professor of political science at UNH where he taught for more than 20 years.

He has served two terms on the governing council of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the foremost organization of public opinion pollsters in the country. He is also author of *How to Steal An Election: The Inside Story of How George Bush's Brother and Fox Network Miscalled the 2000 Election and Changed the Course of History* (Nation Books, 2006) and *The Superpollsters: How They Measure and Manipulate Public Opinion in America* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1992; revised trade paperback edition, 1995). He has published numerous articles in academic journals, newspapers, books, and magazines, including *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *The Nation*, *Public Perspective*, and *Boston Globe*. He lives in Durham.

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