



## Zogby, John (1948– )

JOHN ZOGBY IS one of the best-known political pollsters in America, yet he is also quite controversial. Zogby's declared ambition is to become the Gallup of his generation, the brand name in polling worldwide. He had some important successes, most notably with the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, but also some failures, as in 2004, when he called the election for Kerry. His methods are unconventional, drawing criticism from other pollsters. Zogby describes himself as a Democrat; but he describes his organization as independent and nonpartisan, doing work for both parties.

Zogby is a second generation Lebanese American, born and raised in Utica, New York. He attended Le Moyne College, a Jesuit school in Syracuse, and received a graduate degree in history from Syracuse University. He then returned to Utica where he combined teaching with consumer activism. In 1981, he made an unsuccessful attempt to get the Democratic nomination for mayor of Utica. In the early 1980s, he and his brother James were involved in Arab-American political activism, and then in 1984 they chose different careers. John started his own polling organization, Zogby International, which has 50 full-time employees and \$5 million in annual sales, while James is head of the Arab-American Institute. John Zogby has polled in various places

outside the United States, including Canada, Mexico, Israel, and Iran.

Zogby's first breakthrough came in 1994, when he polled the gubernatorial election in New York. He was the only pollster who indicated that the Republican challenger George Pataki would win, while all others claimed that the incumbent, Governor Mario Cuomo, would be re-elected. Pataki's victory brought Zogby in to the national spotlight. Two years later, when most polls indicated that Bill Clinton's victory over Bob Dole would be in the double-digits, Zogby was once more a lone voice, predicting a narrower margin of only 8.1 percent (the actual difference was 8.4 percent). The 2000 election was another triumph for Zogby. For the whole month of October, various polls showed George W. Bush far ahead in the lead. However, right before the election, Zogby's tracking polls showed Gore closing the gap, forecasting a tight contest. However, the 2004 election was an embarrassment for Zogby, who before the election predicted an easy victory for Kerry, with at least 311 electoral votes. On Election Day, Zogby called the election for Kerry. In his defense, Zogby argues that his final polls were on target, and his mistake was to make a prediction based on preliminary results.

Probably the most controversial of all of Zogby's methods is his weighting of the results by party. Weighting is a technique that is regularly employed in polling

in order to make the sample more like the actual population from which the sample is drawn. For instance, if a pollster is interested in a representative sample of the population of the United States, but only six percent of the sample is African American, then each African American in the sample is given twice the weight of other individuals, so that the impact of African Americans in the sample becomes the same as in the population of the United States (12 percent).

According to Zogby, weighting should not be limited to race or gender, but extended to partisanship as well. The main reason is that conservatives tend to be more reluctant to answer to pollsters, and, therefore, a typical poll tends to underestimate the level of Republican support. To this, critics counter that partisanship is unlike

race or gender; it is the very thing that is being studied, and it is unscientific to adjust the results based on prior assumptions about the share of Democrats and Republicans in the population.

**SEE ALSO:** Gallup, George; Mitofsky, Warren Jay; Polling and Election Studies Organizations.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** Larissa MacFarquhar, "The Pollster: Does John Zogby Know Who Will Win the Election?" *New Yorker* (October 18, 2004); Zogby International, [www.zogby.com](http://www.zogby.com) (cited August 2007).

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