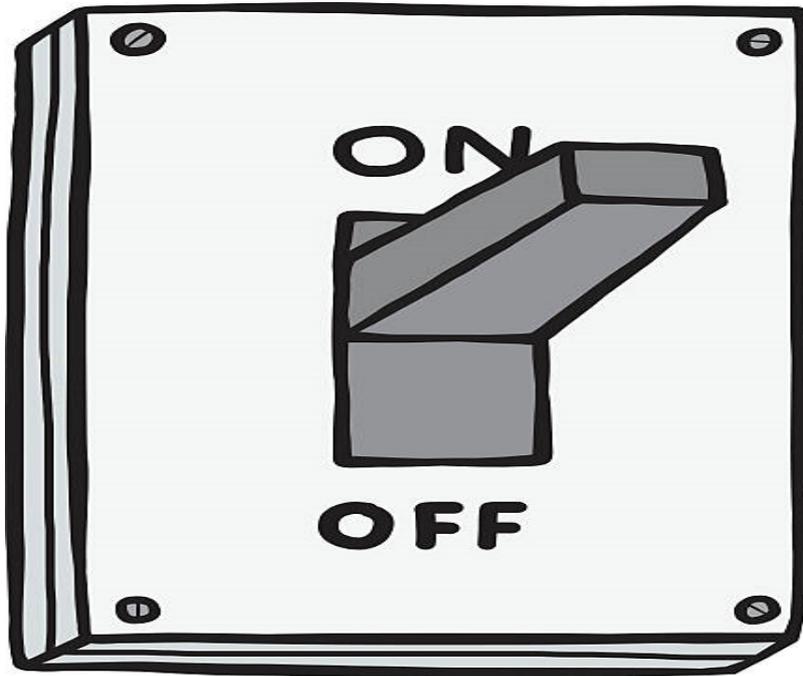# CIIER

Measuring Trust – The Binary Conundrum

Trust is not binary – so why is it measured that way?

We are all familiar with the measurement of electoral trust indicated by "approval" polling results. These are usually expressed as "Preferred Prime Minister" or the like. These polls express "approval" ratings as a percentage of voters surveyed indicating either "approval" or "disapproval" of , normally the incumbent, and the leader of the opposition.

The problem with this binary measure of "approval" (or trust), is that it ignores the nuances of such approval.

In a voting system based on "first past the post" results, such nuances are , perhaps, less relevant, as the voter is left with a stark choice of voting "for" or voting "against', a binary choice.

In the Australian voting system, however, our vote in the lower house, is 'preferential' in that, until a 50% +1 margin is achieved, votes for losing candidates are redistributed to remaining candidates based upon expressed preferences. The result is that, at best, the "most preferred" (sometimes called the "least loathed") candidate, is elected regardless of any deficit in their 'primary' vote.

Accordingly, the candidate indicated as "preferred" by conventional approval polling, may often , in Australia, not be the "most preferred" in a real election.

This is easily illustrated by a simple test of five voters and two candidates using a simple weighted scoring system, based on levels of trust:

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Trust measure weighting and voting

Trust Measure	Weighted score
Not trusted at all	0
Mostly not trusted	1
Slightly mistrusted	2
Neither trusted nor mistrusted	2.5
Slightly trusted	3
Mostly trusted	4
Completely trusted	5

Voter	Candidate A	Candidate B	Approval A	Approval B
1	Slightly mistrusted	Slightly trusted		1
2	Slightly mistrusted	Neither trusted nor mistrusted		
3	Neither trusted nor mistrusted	Slightly trusted		1
4	Mostly trusted	Not trusted at all	1	
5	Completely trusted	Not trusted at all	1	
"binary" score			40%	40%
Average			62%	34%
Median			50%	50%

Based upon this simple scenario, a conventional poll would say that Candidate A had a 40% "approval" rating, whereas Candidate B also had a 40% approval rating.

Despite the median position also mirroring a 50/50 split, the more nuanced average score would suggest that Candidate A had a "most preferred" advantage at 62%. over Candidate B, on 34%.

In an actual election, if these same attitudes of trust were maintained, it is more likely that the voters originally selecting an alternative candidate, illustrated by voter 2 in our example, would tend their preferences to the "least loathed" candidate. Candidate A, in our example.

Approval, like trust, is not a binary choice, even if some of us are forced by our voting systems into making such a choice.

Ian Dennis. July 2020.

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