

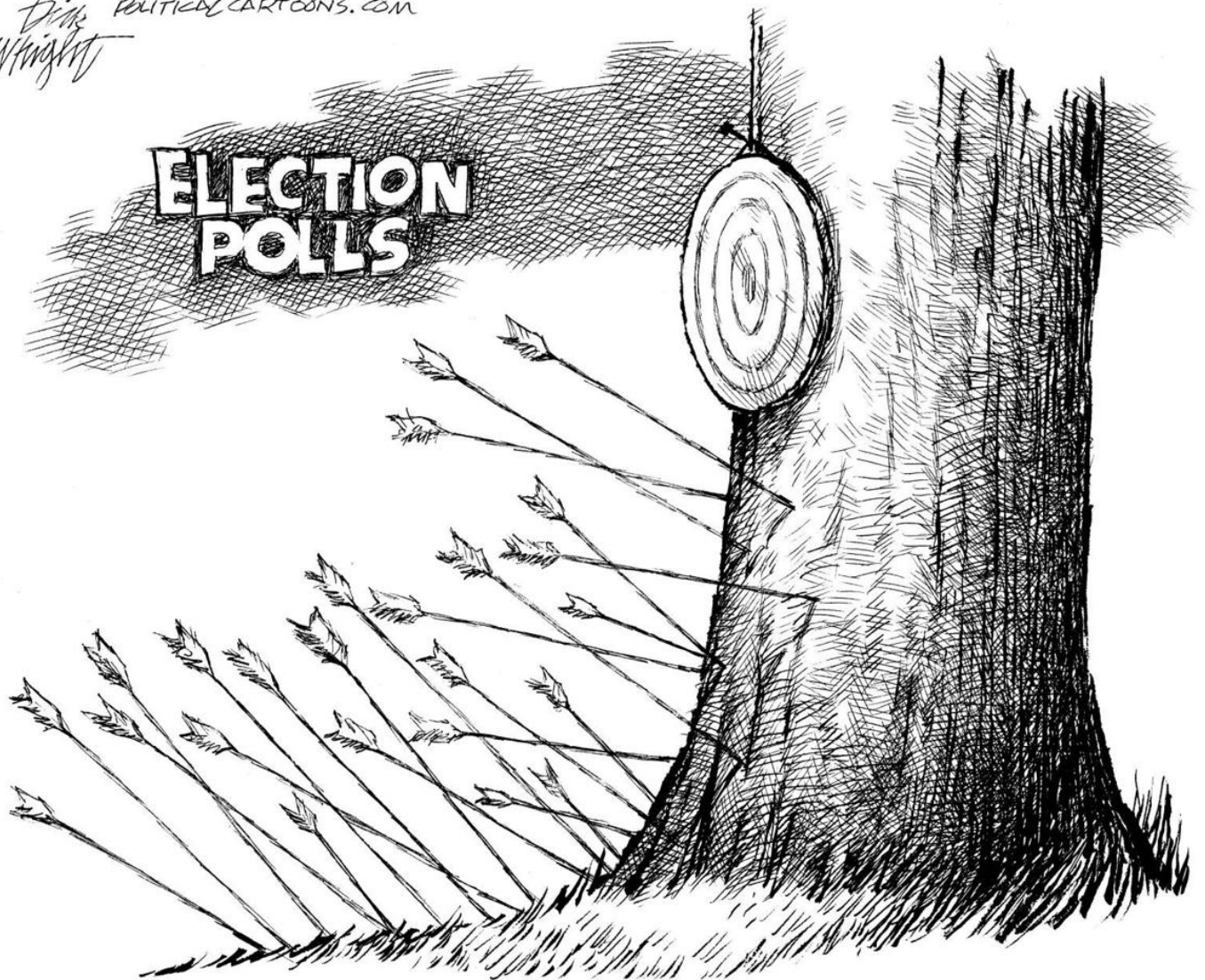
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# Challenges, inaccuracies lead Stockton University institute to end head-to-head polls, by John Froonjian

John Froonjian For The Press

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n the fall of 2012, the new Stockton Polling Institute at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at what was then Stockton College conducted its very first poll, **I** correctly showing a win for incumbent Republican U.S. Congressman Frank LoBiondo.

Over almost a decade, the Stockton Polling Institute has conducted dozens of polls on elections and local and statewide issues, giving voice to the views of thousands of residents in South Jersey and around the state.

But times change and so too has polling. Hardly anyone answers the phone anymore. Response rates have plummeted. Polls take longer to conduct and costs have skyrocketed. Recently, many polling calls are being labeled as spam by cell phone carriers.

The Stockton Poll has adapted, but one area has become especially daunting — election polls. Because these challenges have resulted in inaccurate results, the Stockton Polling Institute will no longer conduct head-to-head election polls measuring support for candidates.

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This was not an easy decision. The Hughes Center was founded on the concept of representing a voice for South Jersey. About 1,000 Stockton students have worked in the institute's call center, learning about the process and participating in our

democratic elections. The staff has been diligent in a commitment to fairness and accuracy, being ranked among the top 18% of polling centers nationally in quality by the respected FiveThirtyEight blog.

But as elections have become more polarized, so has polling. People are more reluctant to share their views with a pollster. Some have said they don't trust polls and are therefore less likely to participate.

Election polls can't be accurate if certain voters aren't reflected in the results. The Polling Institute's record for accurately predicting the winner in local races was broken in a 2019 legislative race. Polls statewide, including Stockton, under-counted Republican support in the 2021 gubernatorial race. Stockton Polling had the wrong candidate in the lead for the District 2 state Senate race.

Election polls have always presented challenges. Unlike opinion surveys, in which a known population is being polled, pollsters do not know who will show up on Election Day, especially in a changing political climate. Those identified as likely voters may never actually vote, and vice versa. If certain potential voters choose not to participate in polling, it makes it even more difficult to accurately model the electorate.

The Stockton Polling Institute will continue polling but will concentrate instead on opinion surveys about issues important to New Jersey, such as the recent poll on New Jersey residents' views on the economy. Research indicates the problem affecting election polls is not hurting issues polling. By focusing on issues, the Hughes Center can continue public-minded research that gives voice to the people of this region.

Other changes are coming as well.

The Polling Institute, under the leadership of Research Associate Alyssa Maurice, will conduct more research online by texting links to web surveys to respondents with cell phones. It will also investigate using online panels of respondents in suitable projects. We hope area residents will choose to be part of the process.

Unfortunately, fewer students are needed in this new structure, so the Polling Institute will no longer operate its own call center.

Evolving technology, changes in social patterns and political upheaval have combined to make polling increasingly difficult. But people still want to know what their neighbors think about the latest policy proposal or social and economic trends. The Hughes Center remains committed to sharing those voices.

John Froonjian, of Audubon, is executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.