The Literary Digest Poll of 1936

In 1936, Democratic incumbent Franklin Delano Roosevelt was running against Republican Alfred Landon. The United States was still suffering the effects of the Great Depression.

*The Literary Digest* was a famous and popular magazine that had successfully predicted the outcome of the presidential election for many years.

*The Literary Digest* again administered its pre-election poll. It mailed out a staggering 10,000,000 postcards to individuals. The mailing list was created using the magazine’s subscription list, along with a list of people with car registrations and telephones. About 2.4 million of the postcards were returned. Based on this response, *The Literary Digest* said that Landon would win by a huge margin.

Roosevelt won by a landslide.

What was the sampling frame used by *The Literary Digest*?

Was it the desired sampling frame?

What errors in sampling can you identify?

What type of sampling was used? (random, convenience, cluster, stratified, systematic)

Was nonresponse bias an issue in this poll? Defend your answer.

Did the fact that the country was in the midst of the Great Depression create a biased sample?

Did the party affiliations of the two candidates have an effect on *The Literary Digest*’s predictions?

Why did *The Literary Digest* have great success in its prediction accuracy prior to 1936?