

# The wisdom of crowds

As I write this, the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign staggers toward the finish line, leaving behind a trail of mud the likes of which we've never seen before. When the election is finally over, no matter the outcome, I think we all could use a hot shower.

Like many of us, Analyze This! columnist Vijay Mehrotra craved a truly fair and balanced source of information to make sense of the election mess, particularly the parade of ever-changing and often contradictory polls. For insight he turned to [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com), the website created by Nate Silver that “uses statistical analysis – hard numbers – to tell compelling stories about elections, politics, sports, science, economics” and other topics.

In this month's column, “A ‘Silver’ lining for election blues,” Vijay takes a closer look at [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com) and how Silver and his team go to great lengths to make their forecasting models as accurate as possible, while acknowledging the limits of predictions. Telling an unbiased story, Vijay notes, isn't easy, whether the topic is predicting politics or predictive policing.

When it comes to predictions, I believe in the wisdom of crowds, especially when people have to put their money

where their mouths are. When there's hundreds of thousands of people betting their own hard-earned money on the outcome of a U.S. presidential election or the World Series, you get a pretty good line on who's the real favorite to win. And if you want in on the action, you better check your biases at the door.

Crowdsourcing is a close cousin of the wisdom of crowds. Again, the idea is to tap into a worldwide source of opinions via the Internet, only this time the objective is to evaluate or address a particular task. As Ben Christensen, the director of content relevance operations at Appen, says in this month's [cover story](#) on crowdsourcing, “The power of crowdsourcing is in its numbers.”

Getting back to politics, which are hard to get away from these days, frequent contributor Doug Samuelson takes a look at how Russia's intent on expanding its presence and influence necessitates new approaches to assessment by Western analysts ([page 28](#)). Now there's a policy topic worth debating. Alas, like so much else during this presidential campaign, it was buried in mud. ■

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