Vibe Polling

Can Google Trends Measure Public Opinion?

A Multi-Agent Study of Search Behavior in U.S. Battleground States

AgentAcademy Team

The Promise of "Vibe Polling"

Traditional polls ask what people *say* they believe.

What if we could observe what they *actually* care about?

- Every Google search is a tiny confession
- "gas prices near me" at 2am reveals real anxiety
- No social desirability bias, no survey fatigue

Our question: Can search behavior predict—or at least describe—public opinion?

Why This Matters

After the 2024 election, prediction markets beat traditional polls.

Researchers asked: **What else might work?**

- 8.5 billion Google searches per day
- Real-time, continuous signal
- Geographic granularity down to states

We tested whether this promise holds up to scrutiny.

Research Questions

> ***RQ1:*** *Can Google Trends predict shifts in public opinion?*

> ***RQ2:*** *What can search behavior tell us about which issues matter where?*

> ***RQ3:*** *What are the practical limits of using search data for research?*

Our Approach: Multi-Agent Replication

Instead of one researcher analyzing data, we used **four AI research agents**—each completing the full analysis independently.

Why?

- Same data, different "eyes"
- If agents converge → stronger confidence
- If they disagree → we investigate why

Then agents **peer-reviewed each other** adversarially, asking: "*What if this is all wrong?*"

The Agents

Agent	Then reviewed by…
Claude Code	Gemini
Kimi K2.5	Codex
Gemini	Claude Code
Codex	Kimi K2.5

Each agent independently:

- Processed and validated the data
- Ran statistical models
- Analyzed temporal patterns
- Drew conclusions

The Data

Google Trends: 38,311 search records

- 13 states over 91 days (Dec 2025 – Mar 2026)
- 25 validated search terms
- Topics: economy, immigration, AI/jobs, Iran conflict

Prediction Markets: Daily odds from Polymarket

- House and Senate control probabilities
- Continuous updating benchmark

How Agents Developed Search Terms

Each agent independently:

1. **Generated candidates** — What would real people search?
    - "Informed" terms: *Iran news, election 2026*
    - "Anxiety" terms: *why is food so expensive*
2. **Validated nationally** — Does it have search volume?
3. **Tested at state level** — Does it hold up in smaller populations?
4. **Compared across agents** — Did multiple agents retain it?

Result: 76 candidates → 25 survivors

States We Studied

Battleground: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina

For comparison: California, Texas, Ohio

Caution needed: Maine, New Hampshire, Minnesota

(Small populations = unreliable search data)

Finding 1

The Predictive Hypothesis Fails

Search Doesn't Predict Markets

We tested whether today's searches predict tomorrow's market movements.

Result: No consistent relationship.

What we tested	Significant?
Searches → Market shifts	2 of 14 states
Market shifts → Searches	4 of 14 states

Markets *lead* searches more often than the reverse.

People react to news; they don't forecast it.

The Correlation Trap

At first glance, search trends and market odds seemed related.

State	Initial correlation
Nevada	r = .61
California	r = .58
Wisconsin	r = .45

But this was an illusion...

Both Lines Were Just Going Up

When we accounted for the fact that *both* series were trending upward over time, the correlations collapsed.

State	After adjustment
Nevada	r = .08
California	r = −.13
Wisconsin	r = .05

Lesson: Always check whether you're just measuring "time passing."

All Four Agents Agreed

Despite working independently, every agent concluded:

> "*Google Trends does not reliably predict public opinion shifts.*"

This convergence—across different analytical approaches—strengthens our confidence in the finding.

Finding 2

But Descriptive Value Remains

Battleground Voters Are Engaged

Contrary to some narratives, swing state voters are **actively seeking political information online**.

143% higher search activity than the national average

This matters for campaigns: digital outreach can work in these states.

Michigan Is Hyper-Local

Michigan voters search for issues close to home:

- UAW (autoworkers union)
- Detroit jobs
- Auto industry news

+419% more local searches than other battlegrounds

For campaigns: National economic talking points may fall flat. Localize the message.

Nevada Is Disengaged

Despite being a swing state, Nevada shows the **lowest political engagement online**.

Category	Nevada vs. National
Political searches	−26%
Immigration searches	−17%

For campaigns: Digital-first strategies will struggle here. Invest in TV, radio, union halls, door-knocking.

Immigration Resonates Everywhere

We expected immigration to matter mainly in border states.

We were wrong.

State	Immigration search interest
Texas	+26%
Pennsylvania	+24%
Georgia	+21%

Immigration is a **nationally salient** issue—not just a border concern.

AI Anxiety Is Coastal

Concerns about AI taking jobs are concentrated in California (+7%).

Battleground states? **30-59% lower** than California.

State	AI/Jobs interest
California	+7%
Wisconsin	−1%
Nevada	−8%

For campaigns: AI displacement messaging won't resonate in the Rust Belt or Sun Belt.

War Isn't Personal (Yet)

Despite ongoing conflict with Iran, searches about war and the draft are **nearly absent**.

- "Am I going to be drafted" → **97% zeros**
- All states −20% on war-related searches

Without a draft, foreign policy feels abstract. It's not mobilizing voters—yet.

Finding 3

Methodological Lessons

"Realistic" Search Terms Fail

We tested 25 phrases real people might type:

- "*why is food so expensive*"
- "*am I going to be drafted*"
- "*will AI take my job*"

Only 1 survived: "ICE near me"

People search in **2-4 word fragments**, not full questions.

Small States = Unreliable Data

Google Trends becomes noisy below ~3 million population.

State	Population	Data gaps
New Hampshire	1.4M	64% missing
Maine	1.4M	64% missing
California	39M	<1% missing

Flag small states as "low confidence" in any Google Trends study.

Peer Review Caught Real Errors

The adversarial review process found genuine mistakes:

Error	Caught by	Impact
Wrong baseline (California)	Codex reviewing Kimi	Finding flipped from −24% to +143%
Over-amplified noise	Claude reviewing Gemini	Revealed hidden national signal

Built-in skepticism improves quality.

What We Learned

The Bottom Line

What search data CAN'T do:

- Predict election outcomes
- Forecast market movements
- Replace traditional polling

What search data CAN do:

- Show which issues resonate where
- Reveal geographic variation in engagement
- Identify states that need different outreach strategies

For Campaigns

State	Recommended approach
Michigan	Localize: auto industry, unions, Detroit
Nevada	Go offline: TV, canvassing, labor halls
Pennsylvania	Immigration messaging resonates
All battlegrounds	Digital engagement is viable
Rust Belt	Skip the AI anxiety framing

For Researchers

Practical guidance:

1. **First-difference your time series** — raw correlations lie
2. **Validate terms at state level** — national trends don't always translate
3. **Flag small states** — populations under 3M are structurally noisy
4. **Question phrasing matters** — people search fragments, not questions
5. **Use multiple analysts** — convergence builds confidence

The Value of Multi-Agent Research

We demonstrated a reproducible approach:

- **Four independent analyses** of the same data
- **Adversarial peer review** between agents
- **Explicit disagreement resolution**
- **Convergence as validation**

This framework could apply to many computational social science questions—with AI handling scale while preserving rigor.

Thank You

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Questions welcome • Data available upon request

Appendix: State Issue Salience

State	Immigration	Political	AI/Jobs
Pennsylvania	+24%	+4%	+6%
Michigan	+19%	−7%	+1%
Georgia	+21%	−4%	+1%
Nevada	−17%	−26%	−8%
California	+23%	+12%	+7%

Appendix: Search Terms That Failed

Term	Problem
"AI taking jobs"	99.7% empty
"Am I going to be drafted"	97% empty
"Why is food so expensive"	69% empty
"Stock market crash"	95% empty
"ICE near me"	✓ Works