The Bias of the Unthinkable

Pollster Nate Silver wrote a series of analysis on the polling and data pertaining the recent election. The most recent is There Really Was A Liberal Media Bubble:

> *I recently reread James Surowiecki's book "The Wisdom of Crowds" which, despite its name, spends as much time contemplating the shortcomings of such wisdom as it does celebrating its successes. Surowiecki argues[5] that crowds usually make good predictions when they satisfy these four conditions:*
>
> 1. *Diversity of opinion. "Each person should have private information, even if it's just an eccentric interpretation of the known facts."*
> 2. *Independence. "People's opinions are not determined by the opinions of those around them."*
> 3. *Decentralization. "People are able to specialize and draw on local knowledge."*
> 4. *Aggregation. "Some mechanism exists for turning private judgments into a collective decision."*
>
> *Political journalism scores highly on the fourth condition, aggregation. While Surowiecki usually has something like a financial or betting market in mind when he refers to "aggregation," the broader idea is that there's some way for individuals to exchange their opinions instead of keeping them to themselves. And my gosh, do political journalists have a lot of ways to share their opinions with one another, whether through their columns, at major events such as the political conventions or, especially, through Twitter.*
>
> *But those other three conditions? Political journalism fails miserably along those dimensions.*

HKO

The article points out other aspects of the bubble. The demise of local newspapers and the greater dependence on the east coast media narrows the focus of opinion. Independent political bloggers have actually decreased, and the social media has functioned more like a megaphone of narrow views than a means of diversifying opinion.

The problem in his opinion is not the functioning of polls, but the functioning of reporters whose view translated probability into inevitability. It was not the case that they thought Trump would lose; it was that they thought his victory was unthinkable.