

PRESS RELEASE: November 6, 2012

Harwich High School Exit Poll Results

Continuing a long tradition, Harwich High School government students conducted an exit poll today at the Harwich Community Center from 8AM to 1PM. Thirty-two students volunteered to conduct the poll on their day off from school, and 564 voters were interviewed. The exercise gives students valuable insights into the opinions and decision making of actual voters, and teaches them the importance of the act of voting. The results also give us potential insights into the election results.

Overall in our poll, Obama was the clear winner for president, beating Romney 60% to 38% with Stein and Johnson each receiving about 1%. For the U.S. Senate, Warren was ahead of Brown 56% to 44%. For U.S. Representative, Keating was ahead of Sheldon, 67% to 28% with Botelho receiving 4%. And for County Commissioner, Lyons received 65%, Flynn 47% and Seinhilber 31%. For the ballot questions, Question 1 received 88% support, Question 2 51%, Question 3 59% and Question 4 79%.

In addition to asking about how people voted, the students asked about some of the influences on peoples votes. When asked which issues were most important in deciding who to support for President, the Economy/Jobs was cited by 64% of voters, Health Care/Education by 40%, Social Security/Medicare by 27%, Values Issues by 26%, the Candidates' Character by 25%, the Deficit/Debt by 25%, Tax Policy by 24%, Foreign Policy by 17%, and Environmental Issues by 15%.

In looking at how voters who cited each issue voted for President, the three economic and fiscal issues favored Romney, who did significantly better than his total percentage, especially with those who cited the Deficit/Debt, 66% of which voted for him. Other domestic issues favored Obama, as 79% of those who cited Health Care/Education supporting him, 88% of those citing the Environment, and 72% of those citing Social Security/Medicare. For those citing Values Issues (e.g. Abortion, Gay Marriage), 78% supported Obama, and for those citing the Candidates' Character 65% supported him, both above his overall percentage. Foreign Policy was about the same as the total result.

It would appear from this, that at least in Massachusetts (or at least in Harwich), Romney was unable to convince voters to focus enough on economic issues, and that the other issues remained important enough and favored Obama enough to lead to his convincing victory. It will be interesting to see if the same turns out to be true in other states.

We also asked voters whether they had been influenced by the debates, or by advertising and direct mail/calls. Only 8% reported being influenced by ads, and only 2% by direct contact. For debates 23% reported being influenced, and with them, Romney did much better getting 48% support, while for those citing advertising as an influence, 69% supported Obama. This would seem to support the conventional wisdom in this race that the debates helped Romney, but that the ads helped Obama.

We asked voters when they had made their decision for the Presidential race and 86% indicated that they had decided more than a month ago, these supporting Obama by 61% to 38%. Among those making their decision more recently, Romney did a bit better, but not enough to make much difference. This may suggest that the dynamics of how people were going to vote was pretty much set before the debates and other recent events occurred, despite temporary fluctuations in national polls. This may be less true in swing states where the campaigns directed more money and attention.

In looking at the Senate race, while the race is closer, one problem for Brown is that he was only doing 6% better than Romney. Given the expectation that Obama will win the state easily with around 60% of the vote, this would not seem to be a big enough difference to get Brown to a win, if that is consistent statewide. More

voters cited making later decisions in the Senate race than the Presidential one. For the 78% that cited deciding earlier than the last month, the race is closed, Warren leading 54% to 46%. But for the 13% who decided in the last month, 63% supported Warren, and for the 9% who decided in the last week, 62% supported her, perhaps indicating that her strategy at the end of the campaign to make control of the Senate an important issue paid off. One reason for hope for a better result for Brown, was that Independents in our poll favored him 53% to 46%, though this may not be enough to help him overcome the Democratic advantage in this state.

Looking at Party Identification, our poll may be skewed toward the Democratic candidates, as 41% of interviewees were Democrats, and only 21% were Republicans. While we would expect more Democrats, that difference may be more that is overall true in the state, or in Harwich. Among the 37% who called themselves Independent (Unenrolled), Brown did better than Warren, but Obama won with 53%, which may be a good sign for his national prospects.

We broke down the results by gender, finding a significant gender gap with women favoring Democrats more than men. For the presidential race, there was a 12% gap, and for the Senate race there was a 14% gap. This latter result is somewhat surprising since Brown emphasized his pro-life and other women's issue positions, especially late in the campaign. We seem to have also produced a Democratic skew in our poll results since 61% of our respondents were women. Brown had a lead among the men in our poll, 52% to 47%, so this race again may be closer than our overall result.

Lastly, we broke the results down by age, comparing young (18-39), middle aged (40-59) and older (60+) voters. In the presidential race, there was remarkably little difference in the results as all three groups clearly favored Obama (63%, 60%, and 60% respectively), but there was a significant difference in the Senate race. Brown won among young voters, 50% to 49%, while Middle Aged voters favored Warren 55% to 45% and Older voters favored her 58% to 41%. Somehow, Warren seems to have been particularly successful in appealing to older voters.

We would like to thank the Harwich Town Clerk, Anita Doucette, for her continued support of our exit poll program, and especially to all the voters who took the time to talk with us today. This exercise has become a cornerstone of our Civics Education program at Harwich High School, and an experience our students and future voters will never forget.

John Dickson, Harwich High School, Government Teacher