

Harwich High School Government Students Announce Results of Their Exit Poll

The Harwich High School government classes conducted an exit poll at the Harwich Community Center between 7:30 am and 12:00 am. The students interviewed 370 voters. The overall results are interesting but limited since the poll was only conducted in Harwich. More pertinent is the analysis offered below based on gender, age and party. We also found interesting trends in the support for the Romney and Bush administrations and for the gay marriage amendment. Lastly, we looked at the impact of TV ads and debates on voter preferences in the gubernatorial race.

Our overall results indicate the following: For governor, Patrick received 56.5%, Healey 34.1%, Mihos 5.1% and Ross 2.4%. For Senate, Kennedy received 70.8% to 27.0% for Chase. For US Representative, Delahunt received 70.3%, Beatty 24.3% and White 2.7%. For State Senate, O’Leary received 63.0% to 33.5% for Barros. In the State Representative race, Peake received 55.4% and Malloy 41.9%. For Attorney General, Coakley received 60.8% and Frisoli 28.1%. And for County Commissioner, Doherty received 65.7% and Bernardo 25.4%. Question 1 was losing 60.3% to 37.0%. Question 2 was losing 54.3% to 37.8%. And Question 3 was winning 48.1% to 44.6%. These numbers do not add to 100% because of the number of respondents who did not vote for that office or question, or who did not report their votes. These results cannot predict the final results in any race since the poll was only conducted in Harwich.

More interestingly, we can analyze some of the reasons why people voted as they did. Respondents were asked to identify 1-3 issues most important in the state campaigns for them. Of the issues we suggested on the poll form, education was mentioned as a critical issues by 43.0%, the economy/jobs by 41.6% and health care by 36.5%. Less important were taxes – 28.6%, personal qualities of the candidates – 23.0%, and immigration policy – 20.0%. Least important were gay marriage – 19.7%, abortion/stem-cell research – 18.1% and crime/security – 16.2%. In the governor’s race, the three issues that helped Patrick the most (people who cited them voted most strongly for him), were health care, education, and abortion/stem-cell research. For Healey, the three strongest issues were immigration, tax policy, and crime/security. In the State Representative race, Maloy’s three strongest issues were the same as Healey, while Peake’s were abortion/stem-cell research, health care, and the candidates’ personal qualities. For the other races, all issues appeared to break in favor of the front-runner.

We broke down our results by several demographics. By gender, we saw the same “gender gap” as has been apparent in recent elections. Among men, Patrick won narrowly – 47.0% to 41.6% over Healey, but women voted overwhelmingly for Patrick 62.0% to 29.6%. In all races, women were more supportive of Democratic candidates than men, though the gap varied. In the State Senate Race, women were only 3.3% more likely to support O’Leary and in the County Commissioner’s race, Doherty received only 2.3% greater support from men. The largest gaps were in the Attorney General Race where Coakley received 15.1% greater support from women, and in the State Representative race where Peake received 21.5% greater support from women. In the ballot questions men were 14.6% more likely to support Question 1, women were 10.7% more likely to support Question 3, and Question 2 only had a 3.5% gap. The gender gap continues to be a critical factor in elections.

We also analyzed our survey by age broken down into young voters (18-39), middle-aged voters (40-59), and older voters (60 and older). For the most part, younger voters were more likely to support Democratic candidates, especially Patrick (66.7%, compared to 51.9% for middle aged and 55.0% for older voters) as well as Kennedy and Delahunt, both of whose support among young voters was greater than 80%, while their support among the other age groups were in the 60’s. However, for county commissioner and attorney general, there was little difference, and for the State Senate, O’Leary had the most support among older

voters (66.3%) middle-aged voters (64.1%), while younger voters supported him at 53.0%. On the ballot questions, a majority of young voters voted for all three questions, while both middle aged and older voters voted against all three questions. For Question 1, the support was 57.6% - 33.6% - 32.0 % (youngest to oldest), Question 2: 51.5% - 34.4% - 34.3%, and Question 3 – 69.7% - 45.0% - 41.4%. Clearly, age had a strong impact on our survey.

When we broke down our results by party, the results for Democrats and Republicans were predictable with the exception of Doherty's receipt of 64.4% of Democratic support. Most interestingly were the voting trends among unenrolled or "independent" voters. They voted for Patrick over Healey 55.4% to 31.9%, and over 70% for Kennedy, Delahunt and Doherty. In the State Senate Race they favored O'Leary 57.8% to 38.7%, and in the State Representative race, they favored Peake 51.5% to 45.8%. In the ballot questions, little difference existed on questions 1 and two, but on Question 3, Democrats favored it by 56.9% while Republicans were at 32.4%, and independents narrowly supported the measure.

We also asked our respondents whether they approved of the jobs that Romney and Bush were doing in their offices. Voters disapproved of Romney's performance – 43.5% to 33.5%, with 21.6% responding "don't know/no opinion." Bush fared considerably worse, voters disapproving of his administration 62.4% to 25.9%, with only 10.3% unsure.

Perhaps surprisingly, an overwhelming percentage of respondents disapprove of the constitutional amendment to restrict gay marriage. Only 28.4% supported it while 65.7% did not (5.9% did not respond). Also, gay marriage was one of the issues least often cited as important in deciding people's votes. So this would seem to indicate that voters in Harwich have largely accepted gay marriage, and moved on from it as an important issue. While supporters of the amendment tended to vote more for Republican candidates, this gap was perhaps smaller than expected – mostly around a 10% gap. Though in the governor's race the gap was about 21% - supporters of the amendment actually favoring Healey 48.1% to 42.3%. The most dramatic gap was in the State Representative race, where those who favor the amendment supported Maloy (67.3% to 30.0%) while opponents supported Peake (68.0% to 29.3%) – suggesting that this was perhaps a more critical issue in this race.

We also asked whether candidates were influenced in the governor's race by the debates or TV ads. Those who reported being influenced by ads supported Patrick more (64.5% to 26.4% for Healey) than those who were not influenced (53.0% to 38.1%), suggesting that the ads – most prominent of which were attack ads by Healey – hurt the Republican candidate. Those voters who watched at least some of the gubernatorial debates were 9% more likely to support Patrick than those who did not.

Overall, the results give us some interesting insights into the campaigns and are a credit to the hard work of the government students at Harwich High School who conducted the survey, entered the data, and helped analyze the results.