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Harwich High School Exit Poll Predicts Coakley, Brown as Winners

Based on an exit poll of 309 voters conducted by Harwich High School Government students at the Harwich Community Center between 9 AM and 1 PM, we predict that Martha Coakley and Scott Brown will win their respective primary elections. In the Democratic primary, Coakley obtained 47% support in the poll, Capuano 22%, Khazei 21%, and Pagliuca 9%. In the Republican primary, Brown received 93% and Robinson 7%.

The poll indicates some reasons for Coakley's success. Most prominently, the poll show that Coakley supporters felt more strongly about their candidate than did those of other candidates, Capuano in particular. Among Coakley voters, 73% reported that they strongly favored their candidate (24% liked her with reservations, 3% did not feel strongly) compared to 43% for Capuano (47% liked, 10% did not feel strongly). This enthusiasm is an advantage in a low turnout election.

When asked about candidate qualities, experience was most often cited as important – by 33% of Democratic voters, and these voters nearly split between Coakley and Capuano, suggesting that his argument about his experience in Congress has some traction, but among those that reported that trust (22% of voters) and values (20%) were most important, Coakley held a large edge.

In responding to which issues were most important, voters most often cited health care (49 %), followed by the economy (39%), war (27%), and character (22%). The war was the least favorable issue for Coakley, possibly because of her lack of foreign policy experience. Still she received a plurality of those citing all of these issues.

In our survey, gender did not seem to be a large factor – women were only slightly more likely to support Coakley than men, and women did not show the traditional gender gap in being more supportive of democratic candidates. We also had many more women represented in our survey. This may be due to the non-competitive Republican race that motivated more Democratic leaners, and possibly more women, to vote.

By age, older voters (60+) represented nearly 60% of our survey. This may be due to more consistent voting habits by older voters especially in a low turnout special primary, and our polling during work hours. Coakley was most preferred by older Democratic voters (44%) though she was even stronger among middle aged (40-59) voters, with 54% support.

Khazei did unexpectedly well in our poll, with 21% and nearly tied with Capuano for second. This may have been to the enthusiasm of his supporters (67% strongly supported), and his popularity among registered Democrats (24%) and among those who cited character as an important issue (24%).

Of course, a small poll like this taken at only one polling place cannot be expected to accurately predict the outcome of a statewide race. But our poll shows some clear trends that may carry across the state. It also indicates some reasons behind voters' decisions that can help illuminate the final results. Most importantly, it gave our students a chance to see democracy in action and to interview voters and see what made them choose different candidates. We are grateful to Town Clerk Anita Doucette and the Harwich community for supporting this ongoing program.

For complete results, and results of past exit polls and surveys, visit –
<http://www.harwich.edu/depts/history/dickson/gov.html>

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