

Suffolk University New Hampshire Polling Summary

A lot has been written about how Suffolk University was within the margin of error (+/- 4.4%) of the New Hampshire Democratic and Republican Primaries. Yet, very little has been written about why. Here's a summary of how Suffolk University was one of the "least imperfect" of the lot:

1. **Rolling Average:** Suffolk University uses an aggressive 2-day rolling average filling balanced quotas each night. Others may choose a 3-day rolling average, but this includes the stale data of three days prior. With short election windows and macro fluctuations in the political landscape, a 3-day rolling average is a dinosaur. Suffolk University has used the 2-day rolling average since 2004, successfully predicting the 2004 New Hampshire Primary in percentage and votes.
2. **Screens:** It is acceptable to use "wide screens" and "tight screens" for a research problem. Suffolk University made the conscious decision to use wide screens to capture the many first time voters and independent voters who were not traditional voters but were *likely voters*. Other pollsters screened these people out of their surveys because they couldn't correctly identify their polling place, ward number, or the exact date of the election.
3. **Age Quotas:** Suffolk University did not "over quota" young voter's ages 18-35 years in its model. Many pollsters, caught up in the pre-election discussions of young voters and Iowa results, chose to quota younger voters as a higher percentage of their respective weight in the total votes cast in the Democratic Primary. This gave an artificially high reading to Obama voters in those polls. Suffolk University used a balanced model of voter intensity, reflecting the proportions of the actual outcome.
4. **Geography:** Although polling both the Democratic and Republican Primaries, Suffolk University did not use the same county quotas for each Primary. Although similar, there were marked differences historically in the Democratic county-by-county vote and the Republican county-by-county which were different and impacted differently by Independents. Other pollsters used the same geographical weights for both Primaries over counting Independents in some counties and undercounting Independents in others.
5. **Undecided Voters:** The Suffolk University polling recorded a significant 19 percent of GOP likely voters who identified themselves as Independents and undecided as of Monday night, leading Suffolk to conclude that this bloc of voters was poised to play the role of "Kingmaker" in the McCain—Romney fight. As things turned out, they did. Some of these Independent voters were almost certainly late arrivals to the doorstep of the Republican Primary. Reacting to reports that predicted a landslide victory for Barack Obama, based on many other Democratic Primary polls, some of these Independents who may have previously been inclined to vote in the Democratic Primary, opted instead to make their vote count in the "closer" GOP race. This was an ironic shift in the last 24 hours.

6. **Bellwether Tracking:** Separate from the Suffolk statewide polls and the tracking polls, Suffolk University conducts separate tests of bellwether communities in each state. In the case of New Hampshire, two communities: *Kingston and Sandown*, were used throughout 2007 to gauge and contrast with the Suffolk statewide polling during the same timeframe. On the final day of the bellwether analysis (January 6, 2008), both communities predicted Clinton wins and matched the Suffolk statewide numbers which also had Clinton ahead in a close race. On the Republican side, one bellwether community had Romney winning – The other McCain – but, when adjusted for the Massachusetts border advantage (both communities were located in a Romney stronghold, Rockingham county), McCain wins after the adjustment.

Other pollster's reasons for their work missing the mark:

- A. *"Hillary Clinton's emotional moment moved masses of voters to her column"* – not true. No question was ever asked on any poll by any pollster of record. Therefore, there is no empirical evidence of this. The fact is that a maximum of 8% of the Democratic ballot test was undecided (many other pollsters had the undecided much lower than this) a day before the Primary and more Democratic likely voters were unlikely to change their mind than Republican voters.
- B. *"We stopped polling so we missed a trend."* – not true. First of all, they shouldn't have stopped polling. There were only four days to poll after the Iowa Caucuses including a Friday night and a Saturday which are not optimum days. Suffolk made the decision to poll all four days including Monday and did not pick up a Clinton surge on Monday – in fact the opposite was true.
- C. *"Clinton's win resulted from the Bradley Effect"* – not true. This claim is sexist and would suggest that women (who voted in large numbers in the Democratic Primary) are more racist than men. In fact, Suffolk recently polled the 2006 primary and final elections of the Massachusetts Governor's race and in both elections the same theories were suggested regarding Deval Patrick, an African-American candidate. They weren't true then (even in conservative regions of the state) and they aren't true now. This was another race, using the Suffolk Model, where the outcome was predicted accurately in percentage and actual votes.
- D. *People were so polled-out they lied.* There is also the possibility that people can lie but the bell curve suggests that this phenomenon is equally balanced and offsets. There is no census-based demographic that has a monopoly on lying such that it would significantly move poll numbers over 15 points in one day.