

# Municipal Elections

## Finding Out What Voters Think

Downtown Rotary

August 1, 2011



# MIKE DOWNS CENTER FOR INDIANA POLITICS

The Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics is a non-partisan organization that tries to help people understand the role of politics and government in their daily lives.

By doing this we hope to encourage participation in political and public processes.

# Outline

- What's on the ballot
- What decides municipal elections
- How we find out what voters think

# What is on the ballot

- Almost all municipalities in Indiana hold their elections in the year immediately preceding a presidential election
- All municipal offices are on the ballot at the same time

# What is on the ballot

<b>Office</b>	<b>Second-Class City</b>	<b>Third-Class City</b>	<b>Town</b>
Mayor	X	X	
Clerk	X		
Clerk / Treasurer		X	X
City Council	X	X	
Town Council			X

# What is on the ballot

- Third-class cities have populations of 2,001 to 35,000
  - Towns with more than 2,000 residents can petition to become third-class cities
  - Many towns in Indiana have populations of more than 2,001
- Second-class cities have populations of 35,001 to 499,999 or 599,999\*
- First-class cities have populations of 500,000 or 600,000 or more\*

\* Two separate bills with different thresholds for first-class cities passed the General Assembly and were signed into law in 2004.

# What is on the ballot

## City and Town Council

- Second-class cities have 9 council members (6 districts and 3 at-large)
- Third-class cities have options
  - If the population is less than 10,000, they can have
    - 5 members (4 districts and 1 at-large or 3 districts and 2 at-large)
    - 7 members (5 districts and 2 at-large or 4 districts and 3 at-large)
  - If the population is over 10,000, they have 7 members (5 districts and 2 at-large)
- Towns have options
  - 3 to 7 members
  - May elect the members at-large or from districts

# What is on the ballot

- Allen County has 8 municipalities
  - Fort Wayne
  - Grabill
  - Huntertown\*
  - Leo-Cedarville
  - Monroeville
  - New Haven
  - Woodburn
  - Zanesville\*

\* Hold election in midterm election years



# What decides municipal elections

- Issues
- Campaigns
- Demographic composition of the municipality

# What decides municipal elections

- Issues
  - Many municipal issues do not have a clear partisan breakdown
  - Municipal elections can be very parochial so it can be a small issue that decides an election, but usually they are decided based on larger issues
  - We ask elected officials to fix everything, including those things outside their control, but we will cut them slack because we know many things are outside their control.

# What decides municipal elections

- Campaigns
  - Due to lower turnout, and the smaller number of votes cast, campaigns must concentrate on getting their supporters to the polls
  - Develop a good message
  - Deliver the message
  - Get your voters out to vote (Election Day is 29 days long now thanks to in-office voting)

# What decides municipal elections

- Demographic composition of the municipality
  - It is important, but not as important as it is for other races
  - There is polling data that suggests this might be more of an issue this year than in other years.

# How we find out what voters think

- Public opinion: the collective attitudes and beliefs of individuals on one or more issues
- Public opinion is important to democracy for at least 2 reasons
  - “Unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all talk about democracy is nonsense.” VO Key
  - Many people act as if public opinion matters and therefore it is a factor in American politics

# How we find out what voters think

- Two polling terms worth knowing
  - Confidence level: 95% standard for social sciences
  - Margin of error: the poll is accurate to within this margin: 3-5 standard for social sciences
- Two kinds of polling discussed in this presentation
  - Social science
  - Campaign
- Keys to good polling
  - Good sample
  - Good questions
  - Good analysis

# How we find out what voters think

<b>Sample Size</b>				
95% Confidence Interval				
	Fort Wayne (254,000)	Allen County (355,000)	Indiana (6,500,000)	United States (309,000,000)
3+/-				
5+/-				

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5+/-	384	384	384	384



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	Fort Wayne (254,000)	Allen County (355,000)	Indiana (6,500,000)	United States (309,000,000)
3+/-	1,063	1,064	1,067	1,067
5+/-	384	384	384	384

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3+/-	1,063	1,064	1,067	1,067
5+/-	384	384	384	384
99% Confidence Interval				
99%	Fort Wayne (254,000)	Allen County (355,000)	Indiana (6,500,000)	United States (309,000,000)
3+/-	1,836	1,839	1,848	1,849
5+/-	664	664	666	666

# How we find out what voters think

<b>Good Questions</b>	
<u>Polling in the social sciences</u>	<u>Polling in a campaign</u>
Try to ask people about things they know about and have thought about	Try to test a message or term so we care how strongly respondents believe something, not if they have thought about it

# How we find out what voters think

## Good Questions

### Polling in the social sciences

Try to ask people about things they know about and have thought about

Questions should not be ambiguous (avoid double negatives)

### Polling in a campaign

Try to test a message or term so we care how strongly respondents believe something, not if they have thought about it

Try to test a message or term so if we want to use an ambiguous term in the campaign, we will test an ambiguous term

# How we find out what voters think

## Good Questions

Good Questions	
<u>Polling in the social sciences</u>	<u>Polling in a campaign</u>
Try to ask people about things they know about and have thought about	Try to test a message or term so we care how strongly respondents believe something, not if they have thought about it
Questions should not be ambiguous (avoid double negatives)	Try to test a message or term so if we want to use an ambiguous term in the campaign, we will test an ambiguous term
Try to avoid using words with loaded meaning	Try to test a message or term so if we want to see if a loaded term actually is loaded, we will test it

# How we find out what voters think

- The wording of questions is important
- In the summer of 2008, we conducted 4 polls simultaneously throughout the state. We were testing 4 different ways of asking the horserace question.

# How we find out what voters think

If the election for Indiana Governor were today and you were standing in the voting booth right now, who would you vote for? (names rotated) Republican Mitch Daniels? Or Democrat Jill Long Thompson?

Daniels (R)	49%
Long Thompson (D)	49%
Undecided	3%
Margin of Sampling Error: $\pm 4.7\%$	

# How we find out what voters think

Now I'm going to read the names of the candidates for Indiana Governor. On a scale of 1 to 10 ... where 10 means you would vote for NAME for Governor no matter who else was on the ballot ... and 1 means you would vote against NAME no matter who else was on the ballot ... and 5 means you are completely neutral on this race, how likely are you to vote for NAME?

Mitch Daniels		Jill Long Thompson	
1	31%	1	31%
2	4%	2	5%
3	4%	3	4%
4	2%	4	2%
5	13%	5	22%
6	3%	6	3%
7	2%	7	3%
8	6%	8	5%
9	8%	9	6%
10	26%	10	19%
Averages	5.5	Averages	4.9



# How we find out what voters think

If the election for Indiana Governor were today, and you were standing in the voting booth right now, how likely would you be to vote for NAME? Very likely? Somewhat likely? Not very likely? Or not at all likely?

Daniels		Long Thompson	
Very likely	42%	Very likely	27%
Somewhat likely	15%	Somewhat likely	16%
Not Very likely	12%	Not Very likely	16%
Not At All likely	30%	Not At All likely	40%
Not Sure	1%	Not Sure	1%
Margin of Sampling Error: $\pm 4.8\%$		Margin of Sampling Error: $\pm 4.8\%$	

# How we find out what voters think

If there was an election for Indiana Governor today, which statement would best describe you: One: I would vote FOR NAME no matter who else is on the ballot. Two: I would vote AGAINST NAME no matter who else is on the ballot. Three: I might or might not vote for NAME, depending on who else is on the ballot.

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Vote For Daniels	31%	Vote For Long Thompson	18%
Vote Against Daniels	29%	Vote Against Long Thompson	31%
Depends On Ballot	40%	Depends On Ballot	52%
Margin of Sampling Error: ± 4.7%		Margin of Sampling Error: ± 4.7%	

# How we find out what voters think

- What a campaign-sponsored poll needs to accomplish
  - Who is supporting us, who is opposed to us, and who is undecided
  - What motivates supporters
  - What convinces the undecided
  - Can anything change the minds of those who are opposed to us
  - What is the correct sequence of the message

# How we find out what voters think

- Questions to include in a campaign benchmark survey
  - Filter (employment in news, marketing, political campaign, registered to vote, likelihood of voting)
  - Right track / wrong track
  - Most important issues facing our city
  - Prefer a Republican or Democrat
  - Thermometer
  - Similar approach / different approach than current mayor
  - Horse race

# How we find out what voters think

- Questions to include in a campaign benchmark survey (cont.)
  - Specific issues
  - Ideas
  - Positive biographies of the candidates
  - Negative biographies of the candidates
  - Repeat of the horse race question
  - Demographics

# How we find out what voters think

- Things to consider when trying to be a critical reader of polls
  - Who sponsored the poll
  - Was it the right population (e.g. likely voters v. all people)
  - Was it a good sample
  - Good wording of questions
  - Were the respondents likely to know something about the subject
  - What was the response rate
  - Do the results differ from other polls
  - What do the results mean (spin)



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