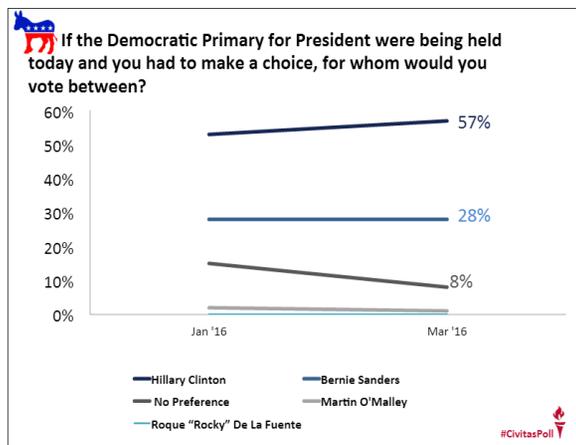


Civitas Polling Nails 2016 Primary Results

March 16, 2016 by [Francis De Luca](#) — 3 Comments

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By [Francis De Luca](#)

The morning after the 2016 primary and reflecting on our last poll, it is amazing how accurate and thorough [Civitas Polling](#) was in calling the statewide primary results for both Democrat and Republican primaries and the bond referendum.

Polling is both a science and an art. The only way you can ever measure polling is when there is an election to compare results against. If we had polled closer to Election Day, the numbers would likely have been even closer to the ballot results. But considering the passage of time after the poll, I believe the election results are a resounding endorsement of our pollster's methodology and of Civitas Polling.

I want to acknowledge our pollster, Adam Geller, of [National Research](#) for his work and guidance in helping Civitas put our polling together. Having one company that understands our state and our needs is a big help in getting things right.

Our regular monthly polls will continue throughout the year, providing vital information on what North Carolina voters are thinking.

The numbers from Election Day will differ somewhat from our poll since we last surveyed voters the night of Monday, March 7, a full week ahead of the election. All polls are snapshots in time. It may well be that the polls were precise at the moment the "image" was snapped, but during the week events moved voters. In the week prior to the voting, some candidates began or increased their advertising or campaigning, and the national candidates' rankings were being propelled by events in other states.

This is especially true in down-ballot races featuring candidates with lower name ID. In such races, larger pools of undecided voters shift at the end — literally the last weekend or even later. The poll was conducted before such down-ballot shifts occurred.

But on to the North Carolina results ...

On the Democrat side for president, our poll got the election right, missing the Hillary Clinton number by only 2.5 percentage points. Bernie Sanders rode his performance in other states to a stronger showing but still came in second. Amazingly, our poll showed long-dropped-out candidate Martin O'Malley at 1 percent and he ended up with 1 percent of the vote!

For Republicans, we got the presidential order of finish right with Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, John Kasich and Marco Rubio finishing in that order. Although in our poll Kasich and Rubio finished in a tie percentage-wise, Kasich had more raw votes in our poll and therefore finished third. His percentage in the election over our poll was close to the percentage Rubio finished with under our poll. It is possible some Rubio supporters moved to the Ohio governor in the final week.

In looking at last night's results, there is no mistaking that Rubio was on a downward trajectory. In my poll presentations in three NC cities on Thursday, March 10, I said that Rubio had flatlined and unfortunately for him that is a medical term associated with death. Last night Rubio died politically for this year's primary election. Our polling showed that likelihood a week prior to the election.

In the U.S. Senate races for Democrats, we got the Deborah Ross victory right, although the polling "snapshot" indicated a different order of finish for the next two.

In the Republican race, the order of finish was the same in the polling and the voting, except for the last two, with Paul Wright benefiting from a previous statewide run and time as an elected judge to finish third with more than 8 percent of the vote.

In the governor's races, there were no surprises. Pat McCrory finished well ahead of the pack with the undecided vote breaking about in proportion to what each candidate registered in our polling. The second-place finisher, Robert Brawley, picked up his increased percentage in his home area and from the area of the state where toll lanes are an issue.

On the Democrat side, Roy Cooper also finished comfortably ahead of opponent Ken Spaulding, who picked up strong support in several counties in Eastern North Carolina and in his home county of Durham to push his percentage over 30 percent.

In the Council of State races, notable Civitas polling numbers included the Republican attorney general race showing Buck Newton ahead of Jim O'Neill. Newton went on to win the race, as both candidates spent heavily down the home stretch. The last Civitas Poll had the Republican secretary of state race with Michael LaPaglia ahead of his opponent in raw numbers, and he went on to win after upping his spending in the last few days.

One notable race in which the poll numbers differed from the final balloting (but not by much) was the Democrat AG race, where our poll showed Marcus Williams ahead of Josh Stein. This result at the time surprised a lot of people as Stein was assumed to be the prohibitive favorite. Again, the polling concluded a week before Election Day, and Stein spent very heavily in the closing days of the campaign to pull out a much closer race than many predicted.

Stein and Williams basically split the state in half with each winning in both rural and urban areas. Stein's victory came on the strength of his performance in the three main Triangle counties, which are his home and where he has served in the state Senate. His combined victory margin out of Wake, Durham and Orange counties exceeded his statewide victory total.

One race in which our polling snapshot could give only a hazy picture of Election Day was the Republican contest for insurance commissioner, where we had Joe McLaughlin statistically tied with Mike Causey — up by a mere one respondent in the survey. Causey went on to win the race on the strength of having run multiple times statewide since the 1980s and most recently in 2014 for Congress in the Piedmont Triad area. Residual name identification gave him the edge in this race. We did get the order of finish correct in this race.

Wrapping up candidate races, we got the order of finish right in the Republican superintendent of public instruction and in the Democrat lieutenant governor's race. In both of these campaigns, most of the candidates were largely unknown and the undecideds were above 55 percent. Only one candidate managed to get above 50 percent and that was Linda Coleman from the lieutenant governors' race, who had over a million dollars spent on her behalf when she ran for that post in 2012.

The Connect NC Bond passed as we had predicted. Using our last polling numbers and Election Day turnout, we have a result almost matching what the actual vote result was. The overwhelming support of the Democrat primary voters is what gave the bond its large numbers.