

POLLS IN THE 1990 ELECTIONS

Editor's Note: Concern over polls and their uses figures prominently in most areas of public affairs these days. Last year's elections were certainly no exception. One challenge in particular was made repeatedly all through the campaign and in the post-mortems: Why are polls coming up with such disparate results in so many races? Some observers see these disparities undermining confidence in the polling enterprise. Michael J. Berlin, a professor of journalism at Boston University, wrote in the Washington Post shortly after the election of the "discrediting of pre-election and exit polls...over the past two years."

We don't agree with Berlin or others who are now beating up on the polls. But we do agree that there are a variety of problems and challenges confronting polling today which must be met. Rather than pointing the finger at others, we decided to begin with some scrutiny of our own performance. Connecticut was one state where different polls reported quite different results throughout the 1990 campaign. And the Institute for Social Inquiry—which is the host organization for the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut—conducts surveys on a regular basis for the Hartford Courant. The ISI-Courant poll showed independent Lowell Weicker well ahead of Republican John Rowland, and far, far ahead of Democrat Bruce Morrison, throughout their gubernatorial contest last year. Most polls in fact put Morrison way back, but

one organization—Greenberg-Lake, which polled for the Morrison campaign—insisted that their man was in the thick of it, until finally done-in by the ISI-Courant poll. Stanley Greenberg, president of Greenberg-Lake, develops this argument in an article that follows.

Polls for the Rowland campaign by the Wirthlin Group had Morrison way back but their own man within striking distance. Neil Newhouse, vice president of the Wirthlin Group, makes the case that the public polls hurt Rowland. Larry Hugick, vice president of the Gallup Organization, which had the Weicker-Rowland competition closer than did the ISI-Courant polls, explores possible sources of the difference. Lastly, Don Ferree, who directs the ISI-Courant poll, discusses what might, and what apparently does not, explain the differences in the poll snapshots of Connecticut's gubernatorial contest.

Michigan is another state where the polls struggled through a gubernatorial race. John Wilson, Gary Ferguson, and Linda DiVall review the poll performance there and offer some conclusions.

Readers may disagree with many of these diagnoses. Indeed, Public Perspective disagrees with many of them. But we think it's useful to let various of the key participants in the 1990 election polling speak for themselves, "with all the bark on."

FINAL SURVEYS IN THE CONNECTICUT GOVERNOR'S RACE

Survey Organization	Registered Voters								Best Estimate			
	Without Leaners				With Leaners				LW	JR	BM	NS
	LW	JR	BM	NS*	LW	JR	BM	NS				
Gallup	33%	28%	14%	25%	37%	31%	17%	15%	40%	34%	14%	12%
Wirthlin	32	27	13	29	—	—	—	—	32	27	13	29
Greenberg-Lake	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	33	31	25	11
Weicker	36	26	12	26	43	30	15	12	43	30	15	12
ISI-Courant	33	22	10	35	41	29	16	14	42	29	15	14

Note: *NS includes a variety of responses (e.g., undecided, DK, other). Best final estimates include those leaning toward the candidates, except in the case of the Wirthlin Group survey. Best estimates for each organization are: Gallup (survey date 10/29-31)—the 61% of registered voters most likely to vote, determined by 5 "turnout" questions; Wirthlin (10/30-31)—registered voters weighted by party registration, but not screened for likelihood of voting; Greenberg-Lake (10/28-29)—registered voters who said they would almost certainly or probably vote; Weicker (10/29-11/2)—registered voters who said they were certain to vote; ISI-Courant (10/29-11/2)—registered voters who said they were certain to vote. ISI-Courant was the only poll to offer initially the option "or haven't you really made up your mind yet." The leaner question was asked of all those who didn't initially choose a candidate. In the voting November 6, Weicker got 41%, Rowland 38%, and Morrison 21%.

THE GALLUP POLLS

By Larry Hugick

The narrowness of Lowell Weicker's victory margin in the Connecticut governor's race took many poll watchers in the state by surprise. The most respected statewide poll, the ISI-Courant Poll, had showed Weicker maintaining a consistent double-digit lead (41% vs. 29%) over Republican John Rowland in a tracking poll completed during the final weekend of the campaign. Running an independent campaign as the Connecticut Party's candidate, Weicker ended up defeating Rowland by a margin of only three percentage points (41% vs. 38%) in a three-way race. Democrat Bruce Morrison captured 21% of the vote.

Gallup's poll results and analysis of the race, released through television station WVIT's news department, provided a somewhat different picture of the race—and one that proved to be closer to the actual outcome. Our final poll, taken from Friday through Sunday prior to election day, showed Weicker maintaining a slight lead over Rowland (40% to 34%) among likely voters. With 12% undecided, Rowland appeared to have a chance to overtake Weicker. Morrison was a poor third in the Gallup poll, as he was in the ISI-Courant poll.

The candidates' own pollsters also reported conflicting trial heat figures on the governor's race—but these differences were, perhaps, expected. Partisan pollsters have different objectives than those who poll for academic institutions and the news media. Although the accuracy of the horserace measure is not unimportant, other goals, such as finding issues that can win over voters to their candidate, often take priority. Moreover, results of private polls are often suspect: those working directly for a candidate are hardly expected to be neutral observers.

Differences between two independent polls, particularly two organizations that are as well established as Gallup and ISI-Courant, are less easily explained. Looking back on the polls' performance, the divergence in results seems to have accrued both from the nature of the race and the degree to which Gallup and ISI-Courant differed in their election polling methodologies.

Floating Voters

As one might expect, Gallup has found the widest variation in pre-election poll results in contests where voter preferences are "soft." For example, poll results released during the 1988 presidential race often created confusion when one poll suggested that George Bush had a commanding lead while another, taken at the same time,

showed Michael Dukakis within striking distance. In contrast, the 1984 presidential race lacked such inconsistency. Whether they favored Ronald Reagan or Walter Mondale, voters tended to feel strongly about their choice. Virtually all major polls that year had Reagan with a sizeable lead to the very end.

The dynamics of the Connecticut governor's race almost ensured that candidate preference would be soft. Weicker, the best known candidate statewide, chose to run as an independent. Moreover, while the former Senator had always run as a Republican in the past, he had always been a maverick within his party, and his liberal views frequently clashed with those of the more conservative GOP leadership. Early polling found Weicker's base of support for governor tended to be Democratic or politically Independent—not Republican. Political liberals had a choice between Weicker and Democrat Bruce Morrison. But Morrison's campaign never got off the ground, in part because he did not officially become the Democratic nominee until September, when he defeated William Cibes in a primary election. At the end of the campaign, some normally Democratic voters may have thought twice about voting for a man whose chances of winning seemed a longshot.

Gallup's final poll confirmed the softness of support in the race just prior to election day. Only four in ten (41%) voters counted themselves as strong supporters of any of the three candidates. Anything below 50% in the final days of a campaign suggests a real potential for late shifts in candidate support.

Contrasting Methods

Gallup and ISI-Courant differ in their election poll methodologies. Three areas of divergence should be noted.

1. **Sampling.** While ISI-Courant used a full-probability sample, with no demographic weighting, Gallup used a 50/50 sex quota (youngest male/oldest female) and weighted the obtained sample of adults by sex, race, age and education, to census parameters for the adult population of the state.
2. **Question Placement.** Gallup asked the preference question as the fourth question on the final poll, after the voter registration and two general questions about interest in the election and past voting behavior. ISI-Courant placed the basic preference question somewhat later in the interview, after a series that included questions about interest in the election, open-ended questions about who should be governor and favorability ratings for the three candidates.

3. **Identification of "Likely Voters"**. To arrive at a likely voter figure, Gallup created a turnout scale based on five questions about voting intentions, past voting behavior, knowledge of the electoral process, and interest in the election. Using a turnout estimate that roughly 61% of registered voters would vote for governor (based on turnout in the last gubernatorial election), Gallup reported the preferences of the 61% of the sample most likely to vote, of registered voters, according to the turnout scale. ISI-Courant did not report a likely voter figure per se, but highlighted the responses of voters who said they were "certain" to vote; and separately broke out responses of those who identified themselves as past frequent voters.

Of these three areas, sampling procedures and, to a lesser degree, identification of likely voters seem to be most important as sources of conflicting readings of candidate standing. Question placement seems unlikely to be a major factor. While Gallup generally places the preference question as early in the interview as possible, in order to avoid potential bias, our experience has been that the other kinds of questions ISI-Courant placed before their preference question—open-ends and favorability ratings—are the variety least likely to influence stated preference. Moreover, the results based on ISI-Courant's open-ended series on gubernatorial preference, which come early in the interview, show results similar to the later, more traditional closed-end question.

Sample difference would appear the key. In comparing the sample compositions for Gallup's and ISI-Courant's surveys, significant differences are found in education. In Gallup's final poll, for example, fewer than half of the

voters (45%) reported having at least some college training, while only a quarter (25%) said they were college graduates. ISI-Courant did not ask an education question in its last poll, but its late October poll showed as many as six in ten (62%) reporting college experience and close to four in ten (39%) saying they were graduates. These inter-poll differences in education are especially important, given Weicker's appeal to better educated, more affluent voters. Among the college-educated group in the final Gallup poll, Weicker led Rowland by 43% to 34%. Among those who hadn't attended college, the Weicker lead is 35% to 30%. In effect, the sample on which ISI-Courant based its results was too upscale, which thus overestimated Weicker's support.

Gallup's likely voter scale showed that the most committed voters—about 50% of those registered to vote—were the best educated and tended to prefer Weicker by a significant margin (42% vs. 34%). But as the sample is expanded to evaluate the effect of higher turnout by including more of the less educated voters, the race narrows a bit. [Actual turnout was 68.2%.]

It is apparent that differences in the education profiles of the two samples contributed to the variation in Weicker's margin in the two polls. The experience in Connecticut suggests that, when major polls differ, poll watchers should look beyond sample size, question wording and interviewing dates when interpreting their meaning. Especially when comparing results based on probability samples with those based on non-probability samples, information about the demographic composition of the two samples is essential.

Larry Hugick is vice president, the Gallup Organization

THE GREENBERG-LAKE POLLS FOR THE MORRISON CAMPAIGN				
	Weicker	Rowland	Morrison	Undecided
Oct. 28-29	33%	31%	25%	11%
Oct. 22-23	29	27	29	15
Oct. 15-16	32	30	28	10
Oct. 7-8	31	28	26	15
Sept.	37	29	26	8
July	41	25	22	12
June	47	18	12	23

THE WIRTHLIN GROUP POLLS

By Neil Newhouse

Three-way races are always difficult—not just in the development of strategy, but also in the interpretation and analysis of the polling. But, in the Rowland campaign, we were convinced that our candidate's message on taxes, spending and waste in state government would in the end contrast favorably with Lowell Weicker's past tax and spend record.

Though Rowland was far behind throughout the spring and early summer months, we took solace from the fact that Weicker's support seemed to have a cap. Weicker always hovered around 40% in the polling, despite his being much better known than his rivals. We were convinced voters were open to a new alternative. Weicker's name recognition and favorability (97% total awareness, with 61% favorable in May 1990) didn't faze the Rowland campaign, because we knew that when he had lost to Joseph Lieberman in 1988, his favorable/unfavorable standing was very positive (72% favorable to 20% unfavorable). Voters could like and respect Lowell Weicker, but not vote for him.

Strategy

Throughout our strategy discussions, we viewed Bruce Morrison's candidacy as a potential draw from Lowell Weicker. A Morrison voter's second choice in this race would for the most part not have been John Rowland. The higher the level of support Morrison received, the better chance Rowland had to win the race. For Rowland to be successful, we estimated Morrison needed to pull 23%-25% of the vote. When he fell short, so did we.

Significance of the Public Polls

Throughout the latter stages of the campaign we were continually frustrated by the publication of research results which did not match our own findings. Campaign and financial support come more easily to those candidates perceived to be in the lead, and poor poll results usually have the effect of drying up campaign dollars. In this instance Rowland's financial support held up well, even though the ISI-Courant poll showed him well behind.

The public polling by the ISI for the Courant probably had more direct impact on the campaigns of Bruce Morrison and Lowell Weicker than it did on Rowland's. It had the effect of perpetuating the notion that Morrison was an "also-ran" in this campaign, and must have dried up his money and organizational support. At the same

time, by perpetuating the belief that Weicker had an insurmountable lead, the poll probably aided his campaign's late fund-raising. Thus, while the Rowland campaign was not as directly affected by the publication of these polls, the indirect impact was probably just as damaging to our ultimate chances of victory.

While we debated about how to respond to the polling, we knew that the press would give little credibility to our own tracking figures, which conflicted with their own.

Methodology and Results

In our polling for the Rowland campaign, we used random digit dialing, stratifying closely to congressional districts, and weighting by party registration. We *did not* screen for those "most likely to vote" in this election, believing that turnout in a race such as this is something that the campaign can directly effect. The only voters we screened out of our surveys were those affiliated with newspapers, radio and television stations, and who were "actively involved in a political campaign."

What did our numbers show?

1. Throughout the last three weeks of the campaign, support for Bruce Morrison never moved above 16%. We had it at just 13% in our final survey.
2. There was a high percent of undecided voters throughout the campaign; the proportion never declined below 23% in our polling.
3. The margin between Rowland and Weicker consistently ranged between 3 and 6 points.

Just as important as the margin that our polling showed, through open-ended questions we determined that voters recognized and understood John Rowland's message. Time and again, when asked why they were supporting Rowland, his voters focused on the economic issues of taxes and government spending, while Weicker's voters were more vague in their commitments.

For example, Rowland voters were likely to explain their vote by saying:

"Rowland has a good plan and is not afraid to tell it like it is. He's young, aggressive, and we need fresh blood. He said he didn't want state taxes."

"Rowland has committed himself to cutting the state deficit, and I agree totally."

"He's the only one who has a clear cut position on what he's going to do with the financial picture. He'll take a strong stand on trimming down bureaucracy."

Polls in the 1990 Elections: The Connecticut Story/Newhouse cont.

Weicker voters were more apt to respond by saying:

“Based upon his experience in the Senate, he has the experience necessary to make me confident he would do the best job.”

“For lots of reasons. I just feel I know him better. I like him as a person.”

“He has all the experience we need to run the state. He has been a politician before and is the most knowledgeable for the job. He has been in politics for a long time and he has a lot of contacts.”

Morrison voters responded to the same question by answering:

“I believe in him and I believe he’s for the people. I just like all the campaign speeches he’s made. He’s a down to earth person.”

“I’m strictly Democrat and wouldn’t vote for Weicker because I don’t favor a state income tax.”

Consistently throughout the last two-and-one-half weeks of the race, the verbatim responses showed that

Rowland’s backing was based on economic issues, while the other two candidates seemed to flounder.

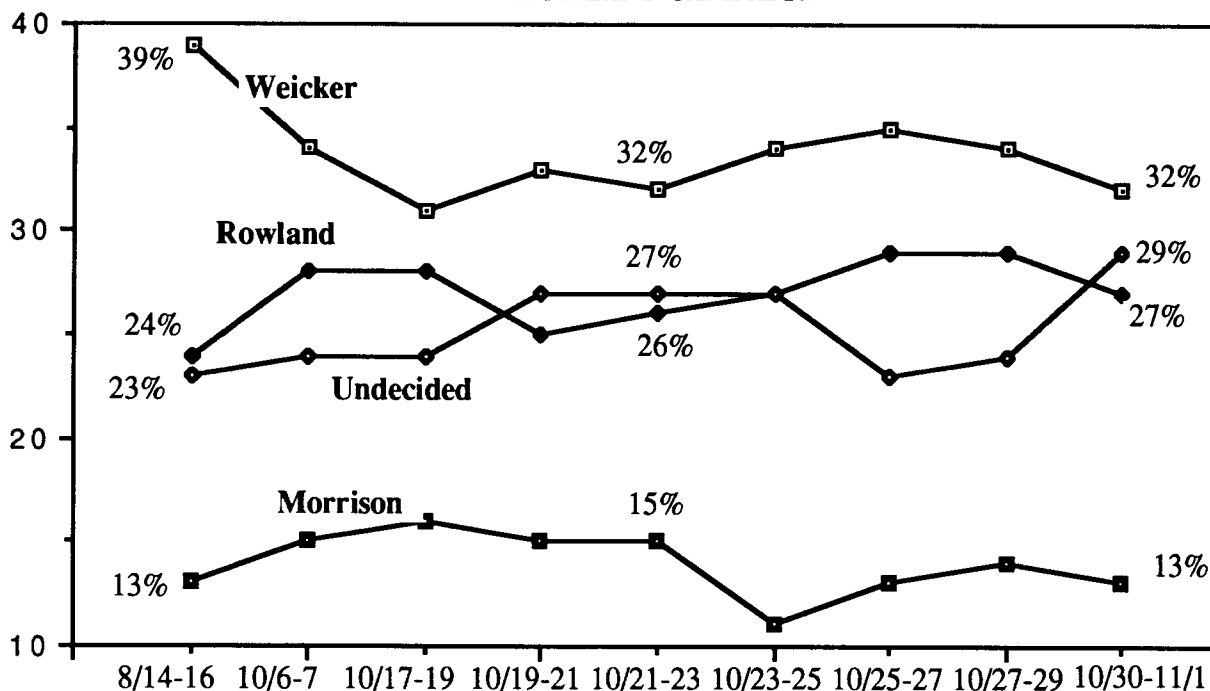
Some Pet Concerns of this Candidate Pollster

All election polls should be conducted over brief spans—three days at most. Six to eight days is entirely too long to collect a sample late in a campaign cycle. There is simply too much advertising and campaign-related activities taking place over that time period to get an accurate reading. The entire survey should be released if anything is. The Courant polls have traditionally followed this practice, and it should be followed not only by all media polls, but also those put out by the candidates. New York State election law dictates that if any portion of a poll is released, then the full poll must be made public. This would not only cut down on the number of polls released, but would allow scrutiny of the polls by the media.

We should stop using the polls to predict election winners and to sell newspapers or hype the ratings. As any pollster knows, survey research is not predictive. But try convincing a reporter of that with five days left in a campaign.

Neil Newhouse is senior vice president, the Wirthlin Group

THE WIRTHLIN GROUP TRACKING POLL FOR THE ROWLAND CAMPAIGN



THE GREENBERG-LAKE POLLS

By Stanley B. Greenberg

Outsider candidates face enormous obstacles when trying to upset an entrenched incumbent or well-known statewide official. The press regularly editorializes against a system characterized by big money and incumbent privileges stacked against new blood and competitive elections. The people may want to throw the "bums" out, but there are enormous obstacles that block the path of such fresh democratic instincts.

In Connecticut and many other states, yet one more obstacle—the newspaper and media polls—has been placed in the path of challenger candidates. These surveys, frequently displayed in front page headlines, reflect and herald the frontrunning position of the best-known (and liked) candidates and marginalize lesser-known candidates "far back in the polls," with predictable consequences: money, interest, and media attention flow to the frontrunner, and the marginal candidates back-in-the-pack are left to struggle for a glimmer of attention and some dollars to compete. Thus for the underfinanced challenger who has missed becoming the darling of the press, the polls can prove fatal from the start. They can also prove self-fulfilling, thus, in the end, "objective" and "accurate."

The Public Polls Hurt Morrison

The Connecticut media polls in 1990 placed big hurdles in the way of John Rowland and Bruce Morrison. Right from the start, the ISI-Courant poll showed Lowell Weicker in a commanding position with over 40% of the vote and Morrison and Rowland barely reaching the low teens. In particular, Morrison, an outsider within his own party and with little money, was continually marginalized by one depressing poll after another—polls which were probably wrong. [Editor's Note: Final figures as reported to the Office of the Secretary of State showed Rowland's campaign spending \$2.74 million, Weicker's \$2.57 million, and Morrison's \$1.82 million.]

Polls conducted by Greenberg-Lake for the Morrison campaign, all of which were released publicly, showed Weicker at the outset with a commanding lead: 47% to 18% for Rowland and 12% for Morrison. However, from the July convention onward, the Greenberg-Lake polls put Morrison in the mid-twenties, creeping up slowly from 22% to 28% and 29% in mid-October and in reach of the lead; but he slipped back to 25% 8 to 9 days before the election, with signs of further erosion (growing uncertainty of support). On election day he received 21% of the vote. Rowland in the Greenberg-Lake polls pushed into the high twenties by Labor Day and, with heavy paid media, into the low-thirties (31%) and a clear second

place, 2 points behind Weicker a week before the election. His support was increasingly solid and beginning to reflect major gains in Fairfield county. On election day Rowland finished with 38% of the vote.

Greenberg-Lake showed that Weicker's support, always tentative, eroded steadily during the campaign—dropping from 47% in June, to 41% in July, 37% in September, and bottoming out at 29% in mid-October. Then Weicker began to make gains at Morrison's expense, particularly among Democrats, as the race heated up between Rowland and Weicker. He reached 33% and re-established his lead in the Greenberg-Lake poll 8 to 9 days before the election (with 11% still undecided) and eventually finished with 41% of the vote.

The consensus of poll data was, first, that Weicker began as a commanding frontrunner but his support dropped steadily; and second, that Morrison climbed into the mid-twenties sometime after the July convention and held his position into mid-September. But none of this was evident in the ISI-Courant polls. They witnessed—and perhaps helped create—a very different reality. They consistently put Morrison in the basement with all the credibility of a candidate hovering in the mid-teens. Rowland had the resources to overcome this "official reading" of the race, but Morrison did not.

Why the Different Findings?

Why did the Greenberg-Lake and ISI-Courant polls—which started with virtually identical base-line results—come to witness entirely different campaigns? The explanation, I believe, lies in differing survey techniques, candidate biases, and survey interpretations.

Survey Techniques. Probably the most important difference between the two surveys—and symptomatic of the radically different approaches to electoral polling—centers on the wording of the "horse race" question. The ISI-Courant poll asks respondents for whom they intend to vote, while inviting an undecided response—"or don't you have enough information to make up your mind yet?" That wording actually provides a civic rationale, insufficient information, for not expressing a preference. While the survey follows up and allows respondents to express a leaning toward one of the candidates, the undecided response has already been legitimized. A well-known or incumbent candidate—like Lowell Weicker—is not likely to be unduly inconvenienced by that question wording. His supporters had enough information to respond, even early in the spring. But supporters of lesser-known candidates, like Rowland and Morrison, will have less information and will prove more tentative. Their supporters, particularly before the advent of paid TV, were more likely to have been put off their preference by the ISI-

Courant wording. Since the ISI-Courant poll did not screen for likely voters, its respondents were probably less-informed and more easily moved to an undecided response.

The Greenberg-Lake polls screened respondents to ensure that they were both registered and likely to vote (probability above 50%). The "horse race" question allowed, but did not invite, an undecided response. And the follow-up question was worded strongly to encourage respondents to express any underlying preference: "If the election were held today and you had to decide right now, to which candidate would you lean"? The Greenberg-Lake poll moved respondents to a preference while the ISI-Courant poll encouraged them to be undecided. The former tended to measure the reality and potential in the Morrison and Rowland candidacies; the latter, cautiously, favored the pre-existing patterns of familiarity, reproducing Weicker's early standing far into the fall campaign.

Candidate Biases. The question order and sampling technique in the ISI-Courant poll tended to favor Weicker. The survey used a fixed order for presenting the candidate names, always ending with Lowell Weicker, thus almost certainly favoring his candidacy. (Greenberg-Lake avoided that problem by randomly rotating the order of names.) The survey sample was based on population estimates by congressional district, thus missing the principal dynamic of Connecticut turnout: markedly lower non-presidential year turnout in the more Republican, New York-oriented areas of the state. A proper sample for this election would have favored the more Democratic Hartford media market, where off-year turnout is less likely to drop off. By not imposing sample quotas by city and town within congressional districts, the ISI-Courant survey no doubt gravitated away from the more Democratic urban areas and to the more Republican suburbs, where calling completion rates are higher.

Interpretation. The ISI-Courant interpretative technique was extremely cautious and only in a narrow sense, objective: the survey analysts and reporters tried simply to reflect public sentiment which clearly favored Weicker early. The simple reflection, presented as a concrete reality, missed the underlying possibilities for future change. The Greenberg-Lake polls discovered that at least half of Weicker's supporters all along were uncertain of their preference and, by a large margin, more open to a Morrison than a Rowland candidacy. But the ISI-Courant poll, by focusing on the surface reflections, not only missed the electoral possibilities, but in doing so, made change less possible. Indeed, the ISI-Courant poll seemed adverse to change. It never acknowledged the scale of Weicker's slippage or the evidence of Morrison's summer/September gains.

Little wonder that the gubernatorial contest in the final weeks settled into a two-way race between Weicker and Rowland—taking both votes and opportunity away from Morrison. Those were the two candidates with the money, the two on TV in a serious way, and the only two, according to the "polls," with any chance of winning.

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THE ISI-COURANT POLLS

By G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

In one way, the final results for the Connecticut gubernatorial race were surprising—with an independent candidate winning a clear, if hardly overwhelming victory, and the Democratic candidate narrowly escaping the humiliation of falling below 20% of the popular vote and thus costing his party its "major party" status.

In another sense, though, the results were not really very surprising at all. The incumbent Democrats were wildly unpopular, after a year which saw big deficits and a big tax increase—with more on the way. Moreover, the standard-bearer had initially challenged the governor, a member of his party, angering the establishment. And the independent was not an unknown, but someone who had (a) thrice won election to the Senate and narrowly lost his bid for a fourth term, and (b) long shown appeal across party lines.

What ConnPoll Showed

Much has been made in Connecticut of the differences among the polls, and for good reason. But they also had much in common. Of all the polls released within one month of the election, only one failed to show Weicker in the lead. And they also agreed that a large number of persons lacked any strong preference.

Our own Connecticut Poll, conducted by the Institute for Social Inquiry at the University of Connecticut and sponsored by the Hartford Courant, painted a relatively consistent picture up to the very end of the race. As soon as he announced, Lowell Weicker enjoyed a strong advantage over John Rowland and Bruce Morrison in name recognition (having either a favorable or unfavorable impression) and in the balance of favorable to unfavorable opinion. As the campaign went along, the party candidates

improved their recognition, and nibbled away at the favorable/unfavorable balance for Weicker, but never did away with it.

However measured, Weicker began with a very strong lead. He dominated the open-ended preference question, and was also the choice when respondents were reminded explicitly about the candidates and their partisan affiliation. As time went on, he never lost his "first place" position, although his dominance on the open-ended choice tended to drop as the other candidates became better known. The last ISI-Courant poll published prior to the election, based on a sample of registered voters all of whom said they would vote, showed a clear Weicker lead.

ISI-Courant poll releases advised that the number of undecided was large, that turnout could make a major difference (with partisans probably more likely actually to turn out), and that some partisans would probably "come home" to the relative benefit of both Morrison and Rowland. This having been said, the ISI-Courant poll did show Weicker well ahead—yet he won narrowly. Why this discrepancy?

It is easier to say what didn't happen, of course, than what did. Our results just before the election were no fluke. Not only had our polls showed remarkable stability since the summer, but computing three day rolling averages for the last week of the campaign revealed virtually no movement at all. Could there have been something systematic causing us (consistently) to show Weicker stronger vis-a-vis Rowland than he finally turned out to be?

If there was, I haven't been able to find it. Throughout, we employed a variant of our normal statewide random digit dialing technique, in which telephone numbers are initially apportioned around the state as the population is distributed, and the respondent is selected at random from within household, with up to four callbacks. (To get registered voters, the procedure is modified so that if a household contains no registered voters, a brand new number is selected; if a number is not a residence, or cannot be resolved into eligible or not, a number from the same geographic area is selected.) Our polls tended to take about a week, partially to accommodate the need for callbacks, and partially to ensure that day-to-day fluctuations were minimized. Other polls often were in the field for a briefer time. One can imagine our polls thereby having greater stability. But it's difficult to see how the factors of repeated callbacks and relatively long polling periods would in any way overstate Weicker's margin over Rowland.

The ISI-Courant poll always avoids cues that might hint at the "correct" answer—for example, asking party affiliation before vote preference. It does make it easy for people to avoid stating a candidate preference, by asking in conjunction with the favorable/unfavorable question, "or don't you know enough to make up yur mind," and including a similar prompt in the asking of the trial heat question. However, the various polls, even if they differed somewhat on wording, did not differ very much on the proportion shown undecided.

Sample Differences Not Persuasive

Sample composition differences between the ISI-Courant poll and another poll (such as Gallup) might in theory produce different distributions for the candidates profiles, of course. But the result of any such differences is limited by the extent to which the groups in question vary as to candidate preference. For example, if men and women don't differ much, then a tendency for one organization to get more men in its final sample will not affect the "bottom line." We did not find, in our own polling, any differences among groups (except for partisanship) which would yield major distinctions in candidate strength across polls. For example, Gallup reported a Weicker margin over Rowland of nine points (43-34%) among the 45% of its sample with college, and a smaller five point spread (35-30%) among the 55% with no college education. Assuming our education categories were comparable, one could weight the above data so that those with post-high school education made up 62% of the sample. This would increase Weicker's margin by less than one point (from 6.8-7.5%).

Voter Screens

One important difference among the polls may lie in likelihood of voting screens. Everyone agrees that if one really could assign each respondent a reliable probability of turning out, then results should be weighted. One hundred percent of those who are certain to vote should be counted, but only half of those with a 50% likelihood, one-fourth of those 25% likely, and so on. The difficulty, of course, comes in establishing those probabilities. Respondents' professed intention whether to vote is notoriously inaccurate. *A priori* estimates based on partisanship, voting history and so on improve things somewhat, but rest on the assumption that the present election is "typical." This one, in fact, had high turnout, and the presence of Weicker as a strong third party candidate along with the absence (for the first time since 1974) of an incumbent on the ballot put the assumption of typicality at risk.

POLLS IN THE 1990 ELECTIONS: THE CONNECTICUT STORY/WEICKER POLLS

In any event, whether the ISI-Courant poll used—as on the polls before the last—a subjective assessment of certainty, or more “objective” measures, based on past voting and likelihood of voting, made little difference to its results. Indeed, for the last week’s polling, defining a smaller set of those (a) certain to vote by self report, (b) claiming “almost always” to vote in statewide elections, (c) actually voting (or claiming to) in 1986 and 1988 increased Weicker’s lead.

This leaves the possibility of actual last minute change to move from a ten point lead to one of only three points. Of course with so many undecided, there had to be a lot of last minute decisionmaking, even if not a single person switched from one candidate to another. But this race had a special dynamic. It is at least conceivable that a number of voters (especially Democrats) thinking Weicker was ahead (which our poll showed most thought), would find it “safe” to vote for Morrison to keep the Democrats over 20%, whereas they might vote for Weicker if they thought Rowland had a good chance. In any event, expectations of a Weicker victory would tend to cut into his vote, not increase it.

As it turns out, we have concrete polling evidence of last minute shift. Because we had observed so much indecision in the final poll, and planning on academic analysis after the election, we conducted an additional 141 interviews the night before the election with registered voters planning to vote. (We did not, of course, have callbacks for this one night of polling, but in all other respects, the methodology was exactly the same as had been used in the final published poll). The “pushed” results among those certain to vote were 35% Weicker, 32% Rowland, 22% Morrison. On the one hand, this still showed a lot of indecision. On the other, it suggested that, at the wire, the race was closing. Though not conclusive, the Monday findings do argue that there was no consistent pro-Weicker bias in the earlier surveys.

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THE WEICKER CAMPAIGN POLLS

Editor’s Note: Public Perspective invited those in the Lowell Weicker campaign responsible for its polling to submit an article to this symposium, but their schedule didn’t permit. They did, however, provide us with the following table, in which the results of their daily tracking poll are compared to those of the ISI-Courant poll for comparable periods.

Polls of:	Initial Results				Pushing Undecided			
	Weick.	Rowl.	Morris.	Undec.	Weick.	Rowl.	Morris.	Undec.
<u>6/19-6/26</u>								
Weicker Campaign Tracking Poll(WCTP)	45%	13%	11%	31%			N/A	
ISI-Courant Poll	41	11	9	31	48%	15%	13%	24%
<u>7/23-7/30</u>								
WCTP	37	21	10	32	45	27	14	15
ISI-Courant	37	20	13	30	42	23	16	18
<u>9/18-9/25</u>								
WCTP	34	19	16	32	41	23	22	14
ISI-Courant	34	18	15	33	42	24	19	15
<u>10/16-10/23</u>								
WCTP	38	23	10	28	45	29	14	12
ISI-Courant	35	23	10	34	42	29	15	14
<u>10/29-11/2</u>								
WCTP	36	26	12	26	43	30	15	12
ISI-Courant	34	23	10	34	42	29	15	14