

The Inaugural *Election Integrity* Election Verification Exit Poll Operations (Phase One) Report

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Overview

On Election Day, November 7, 2006, Election Integrity conducted its inaugural election verification exit poll (EVEP), the first such effort, as far as we know, ever undertaken in this country. In almost every federal election since the mid-1960s, media exit polls have been undertaken for the purpose of predicting elections and offering explanations about why voters vote as they do. Our EVEP is different by design: It is not demographically or politically representative of the electorate. It is fully documented and open to the public. It includes basis for direct comparison between exit polls and official tallies, precinct by precinct. Collecting a large sample at each precinct makes possible a meaningful comparison for single precincts - something which media exit polls never attempt.

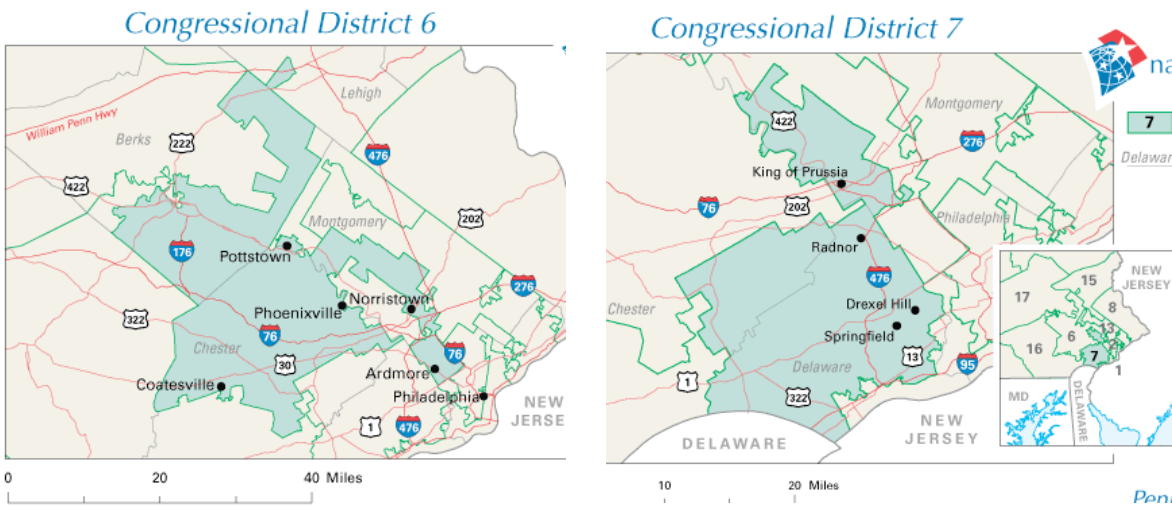
This was a pilot project, undertaken with the intent of conducting such an effort nationally in the 2008 federal elections, as well as to offer an unbiased, non-partisan method of election verification in elections throughout the country and around the world. We polled the Gubernatorial, Senate, and U.S. House of Representative races in two Pennsylvania Congressional Districts. The project was made possible by donated funds and we are seeking further funding now to properly plan for the 2008 elections. St. Louis University Professor of Political Science Ken Warren, who as President of the Warren Poll has two decades of experience conducting exit polls, directly managed the poll.

We chose to poll the races that we did so as to maximize learning with a small budget. It saved money and time to poll in the Philadelphia area, where many of us live and where we have a support network. Pennsylvania was also attractive because it has good access laws -

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pollsters are permitted ten feet from the polling place, counties use a variety of voting technologies, both major parties hold significant offices and the state had what seemed at the time to be tight races of national importance, in particular the U.S. Senate race pitting Rick Santorum, chairman of the Republican Senate Caucus (the number three position in the GOP leadership), against challenger Bob Casey, and two hotly contested US House races: In Pennsylvania’s 6th Congressional District (CD), Representative Jim Gerlach, a two-term Republican who narrowly won election in 2004, faced a tough rematch with Lois Murphy, and in the 7th District, Representative Curt Weldon, a 10-term Republican incumbent and one of the President’s most reliable allies in the region faced his first tough race in two decades, against a retired Navy vice admiral, Joe Sestak, who campaigned directly against President Bush’s policies, especially on the war in Iraq.

Figures 1 and 2: 6th and 7th Pennsylvania Congressional Districts



Source: National Atlas

We collected approximately 6,000 questionnaires from 28 polling places in the two districts. By way of comparison, the national media exit poll had 2,421 respondents in the entire state of Pennsylvania (and this was one of the larger states; only 761 respondents were polled, for example, in North Dakota). We polled in three counties: Delaware, Montgomery and Chester, which comprise the bulk of the two CDs.

Figure 3: Chester, Montgomery and Delaware Counties, Pennsylvania



We used two [questionnaires](#), one for each congressional district, in which we polled the top three races on the ballot, Senator, US Congress, and Governor. The data have been compiled and double-checked and are now available online in SPSS formats (for both the [6th District](#) and the [7th District](#)). This completes the first phase of the polling project.

In the second phase, we will complete collection of vote counts in these precincts and other relevant data such as party registration that we will post. This will permit any interested researchers to more readily conduct their own analyses. In the third phase, we will conduct our own analyses, which we will also post on this site.

In addition to our own poll, we offered instructions to volunteer groups around the country who had requested information on how to conduct an EVEP. These instructions were announced widely to election integrity groups and have been posted prominently on the Election Integrity website. Several groups carried through with polls, and as time permits we will also analyze and report these findings.

Exit Polling Operations

We conducted training sessions for about 100 people, from which we hired 62 interviewers. Four project assistants helped put together interviewing kits for each interviewer and exit poll boxes for each of the precincts; identify and locate precincts and polling places (sometimes more than one precinct voted at the same polling place); and assign precincts and coordinate efforts.

Figures 4 and 5: An Exit Pollster and our Homemade Exit Poll Box



Ninety percent of our interviewers were college students. We sought to recruit a politically neutral interviewing corps, basing our efforts on the campus of [West Chester University of Pennsylvania](#), a state University and primarily a commuter school in the county seat of traditionally Republican Chester County¹, and recruiting most of our interviewers from the student body there through brief class presentations about the project. We also had a secondary base at [Haverford College](#), a politically liberal, liberal arts college on the region's prosperous "Main Line" (made famous in films such as "The Philadelphia Story" and "Changing Places").

We were surprised and pleased to have far more applicants than positions, which enabled us to increase the number of precincts we were able to poll.² All interviewers attended a 1-hour training session in which we ran through all the basic practical considerations, but in which we emphasized first the importance of avoiding selection bias, and, second, how to obtain high

response rates. Enthusiasm ran high in the sessions, with many questions asked both about practical matters and about the nature of the project. These discussions generally went on for half an hour or so beyond the one hour basic training.

On Election Day interviewers each worked a six-and-a-half hour shift (either 7:00 am-1:30 pm or 1:30-8:00 pm). I personally visited and spent some time at most of the polling sites, and in every single instance, our interviewers gave an outstanding effort above and beyond the call of duty. With the exception of one site that proved extremely difficult to find, our interviewers covered all 28 polling places from the opening at 7 am until close of polls at 8 pm, and that one site was covered from 8:30 am until close of polls at 8 pm. Most of the sites were manned by a single interviewer at a time, although we did have a few test sites with 2 interviewers.

I spent most of the day on Election Day traveling around to our polling sites. Although response rates varied widely by interviewer and site, it was heartening that every interviewer I observed diligently performed their assignments to the best of their abilities. The few breaks that they took were absolutely minimal. I did not observe a single case of interviewer-induced selection bias.³ I saw no evidence of interviewers selecting like-minded people; both in observation and in debriefing discussions, it was clear that, if anything, interviewers gave added effort to encouraging those who seemed less likely to participate. That said, we did observe some evidence of non-response bias, which I will discuss further in phase two.

The success of the exit poll operation was due most of all to Ken Warren, who applied theoretical insight, practical sense, and 20 years of experience to the project, and worked long hours under difficult and unfamiliar conditions.

Our West Chester assistants, Shelia Sheridan, Stacey Smyk, and especially Karen Todd, were invaluable. West Chester University was a wonderful host, providing us with office space, computers, phones, and unyielding friendliness, cordiality, and helpfulness. Special thanks to Jana Nestlerode for arranging all this and to Dean Golding and Dian Williams for giving us use

of their offices.

The other highly professional component of the exit poll was provided by West Chester University's [Center for Social and Economic Research](#), especially the center's director Lori Bernotsky, who efficiently managed all aspects of data compilation and brought a level of professionalism and equanimity to the entire project. West Chester University Associate Professor John Kennedy educated us about some useful details of Pennsylvania politics.

Thanks to Natalie Kitroeff and Professors Richard Ball, Linda Bell, Walter Smith, and Anita Isaacs for all their help in recruitment and logistics at Haverford.

And thanks to all our interviewers, who all gave above and beyond the call of duty. Their outstanding work made this pilot Election Verification Exit Poll a success. Perhaps the worst thing about running an exit poll is that we cannot keep the many people who did outstanding work for us on staff beyond Election Day.

Phase Two

The election verification exit poll data must now be matched by precinct with the vote counts. The failure of the NEP media exit poll to provide precinct or even county identifiers with the data has been the most fundamental and exasperating problem with that poll. Our goal is to provide full and transparent data so that anyone interested in election integrity may examine and analyze our results.

Our precincts are identified in the data sets, and researchers may go to county boards to obtain precinct information, which is, unfortunately, a time-consuming task. We intend to compile these official numbers and put them into a user-friendly format as soon as possible, but the precinct counts on which candidates are claiming victory or conceding defeat have been more difficult to compile than our survey data. The three Pennsylvania counties in which we polled – Chester, Montgomery, and Delaware – each have entirely different tabulating,

reporting, and voting systems. Chester County, which uses optical scan systems, is by far the most transparent, as the County puts most data [online](#) although even here it is in a less than ideal format and does not break out the absentee and other ballots from regular Election Day tallies. Our survey data ought to match up with Election Day votes cast at the polling sites, so it is important to exclude any votes not cast on Election Day and to track separately votes cast but not counted on Election Day (i.e., provisional ballots.) We obtained precinct tabulations from Montgomery County, which uses Sequoia Dress, by special trips to the county board of elections. As of this writing, we have been unable to obtain even unofficial precinct data from Delaware County, which uses Danaher DRE machines, despite many requests, the County's apparent legal obligation to provide it, and several promises that they would do so.⁴

It is astonishing that any candidate would concede based on counts in which the officials refuse to release precinct tabulations⁵, yet that routinely happens across the country. In Pennsylvania's 6th Congressional District, Lois Murphy conceded the race the morning after Election Day when she reportedly trailed Murphy by 3,000 votes (1.2%) with 100% of precincts counted (but prior to counting of provisional ballots).⁶ Our initial calculations indicate a disparity of eight percentage points as compared to these unofficial numbers, meaning that our raw polling data indicated that Murphy won the race by nearly 7%. *Election Integrity* counsels candidates to never concede close races before forensic analysis is done on the results.

The other Democrats did very well in the election, easily winning the Senate, Gubernatorial and House 7th district races. In our polls, however, they did much better yet. For the Montgomery and Chester County precincts, there are disparities between the count and exit poll results in all four races of between five and eight percentage points.

Five to eight percentage points is a large disparity. This was a carefully done survey in which we eliminated most of the potential sources of error. Moreover, response rates were high and our pollsters took their tasks very seriously. In his two decades of exit polling, Ken Warren

has only observed a disparity of this magnitude in one race, and in that race, mass scale fraud had been subsequently uncovered. And the disparity we observed is apparently consistent with those found by the media-funded National Exit Poll and Zogby's post election telephone poll.

On the other hand, debriefings with our interviewers indicated some doubt about the representativeness of their samples. Several interviewers had response rates in the 30% range or lower (we had a few who legitimately seemed up around 90%!), and several of the interviewers with lower participation rates subjectively felt that Republicans were disproportionately avoiding participation. In most shifts, a small number (1-3) of exiting voters approached reacted antagonistically, for example questioning the interviewers' or organizers' motives. In a few of these cases, the complainant overtly accused us of having "liberal" motives or otherwise indicated Republican preferences, e.g., proceeding to speak with Republican candidates or committeemen. The Republican Party has been openly critical of exit polls (in the U.S.), especially since the 2004 election. To at least some small extent, such rhetoric has poisoned the ability to obtain a purely random sample of respondents.

I observed interviewers both unobtrusively and openly, and although the interviewers' performance and effort were in all cases outstanding, I did observe one subtle breach of protocol: voters who had not been selected sometimes asked to fill out a questionnaire and sometimes were in fact permitted to do so. In debriefings, it was clear that these were not isolated occurrences, although neither does it seem to have been all that widespread. Even if every antagonistic non-respondent were Republican and every non-selected respondent a Democrat, it could not account for much of the disparity. On the other hand these cases may be just the visible portion of a larger phenomenon. Many people were thrilled that we were doing what we were doing, and expressed disgust or contempt at the idea of electronic voting and suspicion of the election process. These people invariably agreed to participate; and we know from other polls that Democrats are, in general, far more concerned about e-voting and election fraud than Republicans.

We will be collecting and posting additional data that will permit us to tease out polling bias from possible election fraud. These data include:

1. Official vote counts (with absentee and provisional ballots broken out)
2. Precinct party registration statistics
3. Interviewer demographic characteristics, with some additional notes about their experiences and response rates.
4. Precinct voting records by party registration.

I also plan to visit some of the precincts with problems such as more than one entrance and those with the most extreme numbers to try to determine what happened there. We also hope to obtain machine records and to count the paper ballots to confirm the official numbers in some of our optical scan precincts.

1 Official numbers indicate that Chester County supported George W. Bush in the last two presidential elections. In 2004, Bush received 119,106 votes and John Kerry received 108,670 votes. In the November 2000 election, Bush received 100,080 votes and Al Gore received 82,047. Nader received 4,302 votes.

Fifty years ago, Philadelphia's Main Line was one of the most Republican areas in the nation, but like other Philadelphia suburbs, party affiliation has been changing. West Chester University political scientist John Kennedy observed:

For most of the second half of this century, the Republican Party could count on suburban voters while Democrats prevailed in the cities. "Now, you see as many Democratic yard signs in the suburbs as you see Republican placards," ...

"The most significant change on the political scene over the last several years has been the shift in voters' party affiliation," says Kennedy. "There has been a definite movement in the suburbs away from the Republican Party, beginning in 1992 when Bill Clinton was elected President."

In that election, Kennedy points out, Clinton carried three of Philadelphia's surrounding four suburbs. The same suburban support for Democratic Presidential candidates occurred in 1996, 2000 and 2004.

"What's interesting," says Kennedy, "is that in each election, the Democratic numbers in the suburbs increased over time, so that even though Kerry lost, he did better than Clinton in the Philadelphia suburbs."

<http://www.wcupa.edu/PR/10.16kennedy.asp> (October 16, 2006)

2 The large number of applicants allowed us to hire only those who attended the training, and reject any whom we felt that they might not be able to either handle the rigorous polling or appropriately project the non-partisan, election-verification mission of the poll. From among those we did not rule out, we selected interviewers in order to maximize diversity characteristics. We also rejected those whom we could not promptly reach to schedule a shift or who lacked reliable transportation to the polling sites.

3 The pollsters who conducted the 2004 national media exit poll attributed the 2004 exit poll discrepancy to non-response bias, in particular to selection bias among interviewers who were younger and more highly educated (see "Evaluation of Edison/Mitofsky Election System 2004" pages 43-47). In Chapter 5

of *“Was the 2004 US Presidential Election Stolen: Exit Polls, Election Fraud and the Official Count”* (Seven Stories Press, 2006), Joel Bleifuss and I systematically refute these attributions, but nevertheless, they have been accepted by most casual observers as explanatory.

In future efforts, we hope to rigorously study so-called “interviewer effects” through recruitment of a more diverse population of interviewers. The wide variation in our interviewer response rates in this election may also afford us a basis for analyzing interviewer effects.

4 See Stephanie Singer’s blog at www.electionintegrity.org. Astonished and frustrated by this key missing data, I called the Delaware County Board of Elections on Friday afternoon, November 17, 2006, and asked for myself if I could have the precinct tabulations. I was told that the director, Laureen Hagan, was out to lunch, but her assistant Regina said that I could have these numbers but I would have to go into their office. She couldn’t give it to over phone, fax, etc... because someone “might make a mistake.” I said that was OK, but she insisted I would have to come in. I called Stephanie (who lives closer to that office). She expressed some doubt, so I called again to make sure; I was told that neither Laureen nor Regina was there, but another woman named Lorraine absolutely assured me that if someone came there, he or she could obtain the numbers. So Stephanie went. But Laureen, the director, who by then returned from lunch, said she could not allow it. When I told her that we had been assured that we could get the numbers if we went to their office, she said that she would have permitted it, but couldn’t because she was at that time “working with the numbers.” I asked what that meant, and she said that she was working towards certification, that there was a certification deadline and that she was “working with the book and needed to work with the numbers.” I asked again what that meant and why Stephanie getting the unofficial precinct tallies would interfere with that. She said that she just told me, but that I didn’t like her answer... Etc...

5 Delaware County had published municipal results, but municipalities include many precincts. To compare with our polling numbers, we need the precinct counts. We intend eventually to obtain the tabulations from each machine. Much of this data could be more readily obtained in future elections if we “deputize” the evening interviewers, thereby allowing them to view the evening’s machine numbers.

6 Numbers from CNN website, 9:30 a.m. Wednesday November 8, 2006. We received conflicting reports as to whether absentee ballots were included in these totals.