



MIKE DOWNS CENTER FOR INDIANA POLITICS

NEWS RELEASE

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How Close Is the Gubernatorial Race? How the Question Is Asked Matters

Depending on how the question is asked, this either appears to be one of the closest gubernatorial elections ever or it will be a comfortable reelection victory for Governor Mitch Daniels.

The way a question is worded can influence greatly how people respond to it and can result in very different interpretations. The Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics, in partnership with SurveyUSA, conducted a statewide survey to help demonstrate this point.

Version 1 (452 respondents)

When likely Hoosier voters are asked, "If the election for governor were today and you were standing in the voting booth right now, who would you vote for, Republican Mitch Daniels or Democrat Jill Long Thompson?," the race appears very tight with each candidate receiving the support of 49% of the respondents. (For this question, the names were rotated so that neither candidate had an advantage by being first every time.)

The candidates had leads among the groups that would be expected to favor them. Daniels received 86% of the votes among self-described strong Republicans and Thompson received 81% of the votes among self-described strong Democrats. Daniels was leading among men (54% to 43%) and Thompson was leading among women (53% to 45%). Daniels also was leading among voters 50 and older (50% to 47%) and Thompson was leading among voters 18-49 (51% to 47%). Daniels was leading among whites (52% to 46%) and Thompson was leading among African Americans (85% to 15%). Daniels was leading in the central part of the state (58% to 39%) and Thompson was leading in the northern part of the state (56% to 40%). The two candidates were much closer in the southern part of the state (Thompson 51% to Daniels 47%).

Thompson was doing better among independents who lean Democrat (82%) than Daniels was doing among independents who lean Republican (55%), but Daniels was winning among self-described independents who do not lean in either direction (54% to 46%).

Version 2 (438 respondents)

The second version of the question was, “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 CANDIDATE NAME for governor no matter who else was on the ballot ... and 1 means you would vote against CANDIDATE NAME for Governor 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 CANDIDATE NAME?” The respondents were asked this question for Mitch Daniels and Jill Long Thompson.

When the question was asked this way, the race looks a little more decided. Daniels averaged 5.5 and Thompson averaged 4.9. Twenty-six percent of the respondents rated their likelihood of voting For Daniels a 10. Almost one-third (31%) of the respondents rated their likelihood of voting for Daniels a 1. While Thompson had an identical percentage (31%) of respondents rating their likelihood of supporting her a 1, she was behind Daniels in terms of voters giving a rating of 10 (26% to 19%). Approximately one in five respondents said they were completely neutral in this race. That means that there are plenty of voters who could be moved to either candidate.

Sixty-two percent of Hispanics and 43% of African Americans are neutral and 52% of the respondents without a high school diploma are neutral. These factors would seem to bode well for Thompson, but only if she can reach and mobilize these voters.

Version 3 (434 respondents)

The third version of the question asked voters, “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 CANDIDATE, very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely? Once again, the question was asked for both candidates.

When respondents were asked about their support for Daniels, 42% said they were very likely to vote for him. When those who said they were somewhat likely to vote for Daniels were added to those who were very likely to vote for him, his support jumped to 57%. Thirty percent said they were not at all likely to vote for him.

When respondents were asked about their support for Thompson, 27% said they were very likely to vote for her. When those who said they were somewhat likely to vote for Thompson were added to those who were very likely to vote for her, her support jumped to 43%. Forty percent said they were not at all likely to vote for her.

Asking the horserace question this way presents a different picture among partisans. Twelve percent of the self-identified strong Democrats said they were very likely to vote for Daniels, while only 4% of the self-identified strong Republicans said the same thing about Thompson. Additionally, Daniels’ support among strong Republicans (78% very likely, 12% somewhat likely) was much stronger than Thompson’s support was among strong Democrats (59% very

likely 25%, somewhat likely). Finally, when the question was worded this way, Thompson cuts into Daniels' lead among self-identified independents. When asked about their support for Thompson, 47% of the self-identified independents said they were very likely or somewhat likely to vote for her and only 44% of the self-identified independents said they were very likely or somewhat likely to vote for Daniels.

Version 4 (448 respondents)

The final version of the horserace question was, "If there was an election for Indiana Governor today, which statement would best describe you? One: I would vote for CANDIDATE NAME no matter who else is on the ballot. Two: I would vote against CANDIDATE NAME no matter who else is on the ballot. Three: I might or might not vote for CANDIDATE NAME, depending on who else is on the ballot." This question was asked for both candidates.

Thirty-one percent of the respondents said they would vote for Daniels no matter who else was on the ballot. A nearly identical percentage (29%) said they would vote against him no matter who else was on the ballot. This left 40% saying they might or might not vote for Daniels depending on who else was on the ballot.

Eighteen percent of the respondents said they would vote for Thompson no matter who else was on the ballot. Thirty-one percent said they would vote against her no matter who else was on the ballot. This left 52% saying they might or might not vote for Thompson depending on who else was on the ballot.

Once again Daniels showed surprising support among self-identified strong Democrats with 11% saying they would vote for him no matter who else was on the ballot. Thompson received support from only 4% of the self-identified strong Republicans. He also showed stronger support among respondents who identified as Republicans of varying strength than she showed among respondents who identified as Democrats of varying strength.

Both candidates continued to show their strongest support in the region of the state from which they are running. Daniels' strongest support came from the central region (38% voting for him no matter who else is on the ballot). Thompson's strongest support came from the northern region (25% voting for her no matter who else is on the ballot).

Where does the race stand today?

Polls are a snapshot in time and are valid only for the moment they were taken. This poll tells us at least four things. Mitch Daniels is leading Jill Long Thompson, but not by much. Daniels' base is more solidly behind him than Thompson's is behind her. A large percentage of independents could be swayed to vote for either candidate. Both candidates have regional advantages and the candidate who is able to improve performance in the southern region may be the candidate who wins.

What is the Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics?

The Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics is a non-partisan organization that helps the people of Indiana understand the role of politics and government in their daily lives. By doing this, The Mike Downs Center hopes to encourage participation in political and public processes the same way its namesake, Professor Michael C. Downs, did for more than 34 years. The Mike Downs Center is located on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW).

Statement of Methodology: This SurveyUSA poll was conducted by telephone in the voice of a professional announcer. Respondent households were selected at random using a registration based sample (RBS) provided by Aristotle of Washington, DC. All respondents heard the questions asked identically. The calls were conducted on June 10, 11, and 12. The number of respondents who answered each question and the margin of sampling error for each question are provided. Where necessary, responses were weighted according to the voter registration database. In theory, with the stated sample size, one can say with 95% certainty that the results would not vary by more than the stated margin of sampling error, in one direction or the other, had the entire universe of respondents been interviewed with complete accuracy. There are other possible sources of error in all surveys that may be more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. These include refusals to be interviewed, question wording and question order, weighting by demographic control data and the manner in which respondents are filtered (such as, determining who is a likely voter). It is difficult to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. Fieldwork for this survey was done by SurveyUSA of Verona, NJ

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