

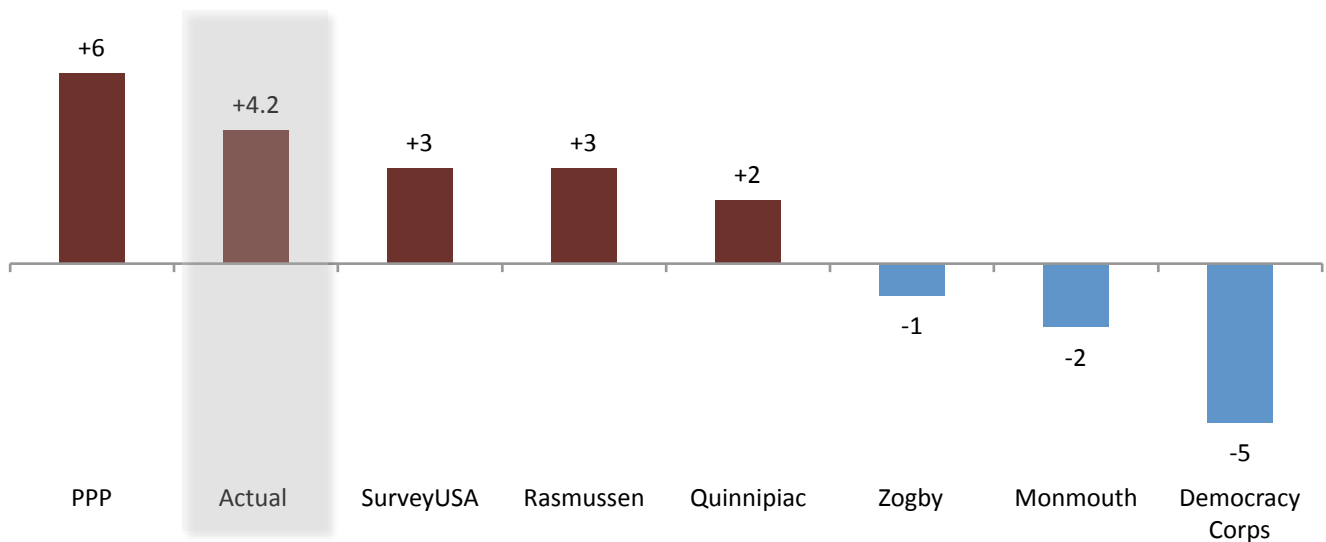
Polling News & Notes

Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • November 5, 2009

Grading the Pollsters on 2009: Based on public polling, last week we predicted a toss-up that would keep us awake well into the morning in the New Jersey’s governor race and a run-away win for Republican Bob McDonnell in the Virginia governor’s race. How well did these predictions mesh with the races’ actual results?

In New Jersey, Chris Christie (R) defeated incumbent Gov. Jon Corzine by a 4.2-point margin. Looking at all public polls released in the last week before the election, SurveysUSA and Rasmussen, both of whom predicted a 3-point Christie win, appear to have been the most accurate pollsters in the race, while Zogby, Monmouth University, and Democracy Corps all predicted a Corzine win.

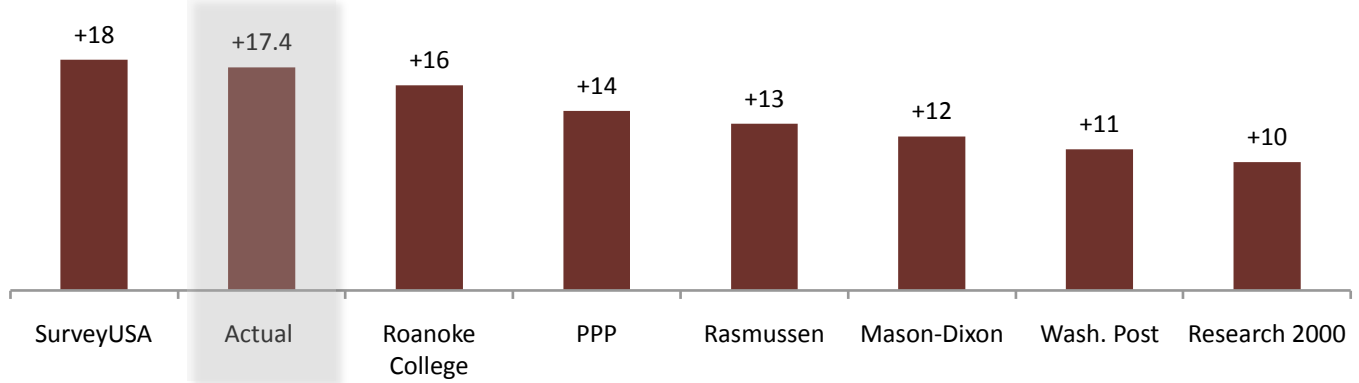
Final Pre-Election Polls vs. Actual Results
(New Jersey Governor, Christie - Corzine Margin)



In Virginia, SurveyUSA was the most accurate pollster, projecting an 18-point McDonnell win that was only slightly above McDonnell’s actual 17.4-point margin. No public pollster forecast a win for Democrat Creigh Deeds, but several—Research 2000, the *Washington Post*, and Mason-Dixon—all underestimated McDonnell’s victory margin by between 5 and 7 points.

Final Pre-Election Polls vs. Actual Results

(Virginia Governor, McDonnell - Deeds Margin)



Yet the real winner of Tuesday’s election may have been SurveyUSA. Of the four firms that polled both states, SurveyUSA was off by only 0.6 points in Virginia and 1.2 points in New Jersey, an average error of just 0.9 points between the two states. By comparison, Research 2000 polled both states and was off by 7.4 points in Virginia and 3.2 points in New Jersey—an average error of 5.3 points.

Polling Firm Ranked by Error

Polling Firm	Virginia Error	New Jersey Error	Average Error
SurveyUSA (automated)	0.6	1.2	0.9
Public Policy Polling (automated)	3.4	1.8	2.6
Rasmussen (automated)	4.4	1.2	2.8
Research 2000 (live)	7.4	3.2	5.3

Automated polling firms like SurveyUSA and Rasmussen have drawn [criticism](#) in the health care debate for showing Americans significantly more opposed to reform than traditional pollsters who use human interviewers.

Yet on Tuesday, automated polling firms like Rasmussen were significantly more accurate than conventional competitors. Voters who stay on the phone to answer the questions of an automated pollster may more accurately represent the electorate in off-year elections when turnout is lower and only the most enthusiastic voters are likely to turn out. If so, Democrats who face re-election next year should start worrying—automated pollsters’ results showing a majority of Americans opposed to health care reform may be the most prescient look at what lies in store for next year’s midterms.

###