

The 2014 Election in Aiken County Exit Poll: Methodology and Participants

A Public Service Report
The USC Aiken Social Science and Business Research Lab
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The 2014 USC Aiken/*Aiken Standard* Aiken County exit poll combined several sampling techniques designed to produce a representative sample of Aiken County voters in the November 4 election. Seven hundred fifty three voters completed the survey at ten precincts that represented all areas of the county (the cities of Aiken and North Augusta, the Midland Valley area, and rural areas) and that had in the past reflected the countywide vote. We sampled voters during two time periods, first starting at 7:00 am and then again at 11:30 am. Student interviewers handed each selected voter a two-sided questionnaire on a clipboard as she or he left the polling station. Voters completed the 39 item questionnaire and then folded and placed it in a “ballot box” to help ensure anonymity. We designated an equal number of clipboards as “male” and “female” in order to ensure that we sampled both genders equally. After voters completed each survey, the interviewers approached the next available male or female leaving the polling station. The number of completed surveys at each precinct was proportional to the size of the precinct.

The response rate for the survey was 67%, meaning that about seven of every ten voters approached by students completed the survey. The sampling error for questions answered by all 753 respondents is a little less than + or - 4%. The sampling error is larger for questions answered by fewer voters.

We can check the quality of the sample by comparing sample percentages with the results of the election in the county. The actual percentage of votes for Nikki Haley countywide was 67%. Our sample had Haley at 67%, a perfect match. On the Aiken County sales tax proposal, 59% of all voters in the county approved the measure, and our sample showed 64% approving. The five percentage point error was one point

outside the expected sampling error of + or - 4%. We suspect that this was due to disproportional refusals from voters who were particularly distrustful about things like how the survey was to be used and about our assurances of anonymity. This kind of distrust is likely to increase the likelihood of a refusal. Distrust also increases the likelihood of a vote against a proposal for a tax increase because a vote for new money for schools presumes trust in authorities to spend the money wisely. We made a small statistical adjustment to correct this slight bias undercounting those opposed to the sales tax proposal. With this small correction, we are confident that the sample is quite representative of the 2014 electorate in Aiken County.

The survey was part of the political science research methods course experience at USC Aiken that is required of all political science majors. The students in the class this year were Brian Aspinall, Brannan Collins, Christian Grant, Lexi Harris, Temeka Mealing, Mary Taylor Miller, Christine Posadas-Kelman, Lakeisha Rudolph, Daniel Stokes, and Elizabeth Templeton. They were assisted by students in the Introduction to Politics class who received some extra credit for their experience: Jaime Areheart, Laura Bennett, Kendrick Backmon, Valerie Larson, Charlie More, Casey Sime, Nicole Taylor, and Joyce Tshitenge. Former political science students returned to act as area supervisors to make sure that everything went as planned. Many thanks to Adora Hawkins, Christie Hightower, Erin McCullough, and Emily Scotten.