

Key Issues Impact the Polls

Close Races, Money, Voter Turnout, Communications

By Tom Schuman

A key number in the 2000 presidential election was 36. That was the number of days it took for vote totals to be certified in Florida and George W. Bush declared the winner of the presidency.

Thirty-six was also important two years later in Indiana. More than 1.3 million ballots were cast in the state's House of Representative races in 2002. Control of the 100-member chamber came down to 36 votes – the margin of victory for Rep. David Orentlicher (D-Indianapolis) against incumbent Jim Atterholt in a revamped District 86.

For a brief time on election night, Republicans were thought to have won the District 86 battle, creating a 50-50 tie in the House and giving their party control due to the election of Republican Secretary of State Todd Rokita. By the next day, Orentlicher had gained a 37-vote lead, eventually settling for the 36-vote margin.

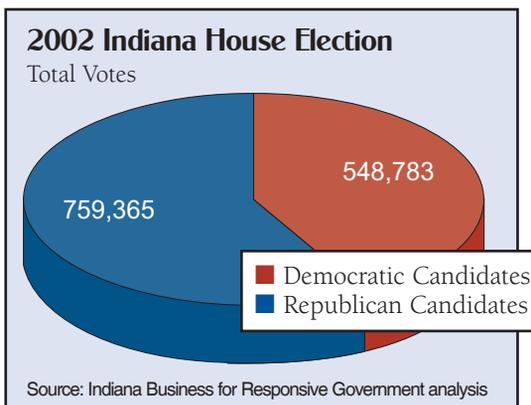
It wasn't the only close race. Incumbent Win Moses (D-Fort Wayne) ended up with a 63-vote victory over challenger Matt Kelty. Overall, 13 races were decided by 10% or less. Democrats were winners in 10 of those 13 contests.

The overall close margin extended to the 50 contested House races, in which Democrats garnered 1,790 more votes than their Republican counterparts out of more than 737,000 votes – a margin of less than a quarter of 1%.

Michael Davis, director of the Indiana Chamber's Indiana Business for Responsive Government (IBRG) political action committee (PAC), says that while competitive races were forecast, one could not have anticipated the razor-thin separation between the parties. He notes, however, that the Democrat-led redistricting after the 2000 election played a role.

"At the beginning of the 10-year cycle after redistricting, there are a lot more open seats and close races," Davis points out. "The trends are for both of those to go down. There are fewer competitive races as time goes on."

In the 2004 Republican primary, House District 86 repeated its close call of two years earlier. Mort Large defeated Andy Miller by a mere 30 votes. Senate District 36 gained the most attention, with challenger Brent Waltz knocking off Larry Borst, longtime Senate Finance Committee chairman, by 38 votes in a race in which more than 12,000 ballots were cast.



Money makes a difference

With so many close races, it's only natural that money plays a major factor. It's not only total funding that matters, but also when the money is spent.

Polling in the two weeks prior to the election showed a potential gain of as many as six House seats in 2002 for pro-business candidates. The end result was a net gain of two seats (four wins and two defeats). Unaccounted for in the polling was the fact that the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) – the perennial power player in Indiana House races – was pouring nearly \$600,000 into key contests in the final three weeks before Election Day.

Overall, five Republican candidates received only \$36,700 of the ISTA's \$1.03 million spent in House races. Thirty-nine Democrats collected the vast majority of the funding, with 42 of the 44 candidates backed by the ISTA being elected.

The large funding disadvantage for IBRG is nothing new. Adding to the difficulty, however, is that the business community continues to divide the financial resources that it contributes. IBRG-endorsed, pro-business candidates received between 62% and 84% of the funds from other business association PACs. Of the 50 largest corporate contributors (whose total contributions far exceed those of business association PACs), only 60% of the money went to IBRG-endorsed candidates.

Calling all voters

Can an anticipated close race for governor, as well as a potential changing of the guard in control of the Indiana House, help reverse the downward trend in voter turnout?

The expansion of voter registration sites contributed to more than four million voters being registered in 2000. Turnout, as high as 77.5% in 1988, sunk to 55.9%. The 2.245 million who voted represented the third lowest total in the last seven presidential elections.

County turnout ranged from a high of 71% in St. Joseph to a low of 43% in Monroe.

Presenting the facts

One way for business and industry to help boost voter turnout is to communicate to their employees about the issues. It's an area, on the national level, in which unions thrive.

According to the Washington-based Business-Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC), 47% of union members said they were contacted directly by their unions during the 2000 election campaign. Despite only slightly more than 13% of the American workforce belonging to unions, 17% of the electorate received communications from labor unions.

In contrast, only 7% of the voting public heard from an employer.

But it's not as if the door is closed. BIPAC-commissioned polls identify employers as the most credible source of political information, ahead of political parties and unions.

In addition, 78% of poll respondents either wished or were agreeable to their companies providing information on government and politics. Those numbers increase in congressional contests in swing districts (84%) and in districts with open seats (88%). Even in union households, 72% of respondents were open to receiving employer-provided political information.

Offering assistance

Business leaders can let their voice be heard through the Chamber's nonpartisan political action committee. IBRG provides financial assistance to candidates whose voting records and/or legislative positions will enhance the General Assembly's commitment to a favorable business climate. Its professional campaign staff works directly with candidates – with services including advertising, communications, volunteer organizing, speechwriting, polling and total campaign management.

Corporations can give up to \$8,000 a year, \$2,000 each for House and Senate candidates, as well as the House and Senate caucuses. There are no limits on contributions to state candidates by unincorporated businesses, partnerships and individuals.

An independent study finds that IBRG does a better job than similar state and city organizations in providing funding for pro-business General Assembly candidates.

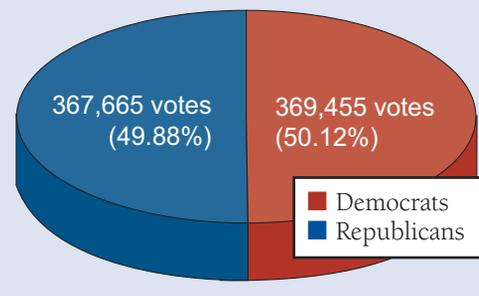
The Institute on Money in State Politics is a national, nonpartisan organization that conducts campaign finance research at the state level. Its review of the 2000 and 2002 election cycles found that IBRG contributed \$944,731 to candidates, more than twice the \$403,756 of the second-place Illinois Chamber of Commerce. (Totals do not include contributions to political party committees).

Nine other state and local chamber organizations topped \$100,000 in contributions over the two election cycles. They were, in order, California, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Las Vegas,

2002 Indiana House Election

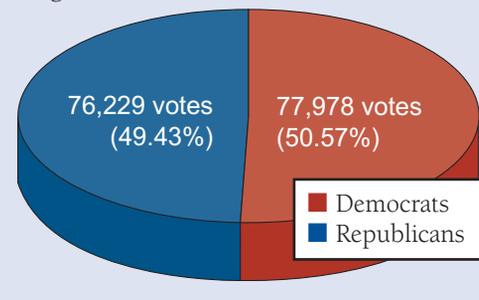
Vote Totals in 50 Contested Races

Margin – 1,790 votes (0.24%)



Vote Totals in 10 Closest Races

Margin – 1,749 votes (1.13%)



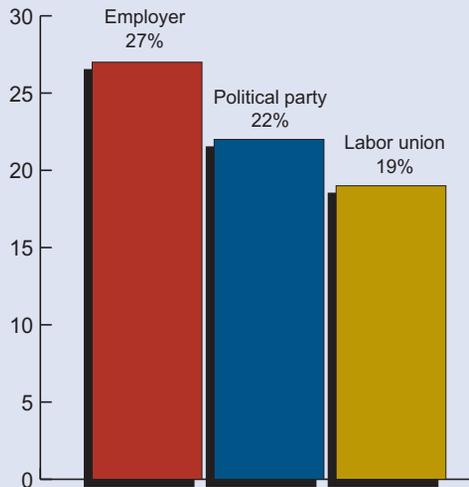
Closest Races

Dist.	Candidates	Margin	Percentage
86	Orentlicher (D) def. Atterholt	36	0.2%
81	Moses (D) def. Kelty	63	0.7%
52	Stutzman (R) def. Sturtz	249	1.8%
45	Chowning (D) def. Borders	289	1.5%
37	Reske (D) def. Steele	410	2.3%
56	Pflum (D) def. Hamm	415	3.3%
36	Austin (D) def. Kincaid	722	4.4%

Source: Indiana Business for Responsive Government analysis

What organization can provide the most credible political information?

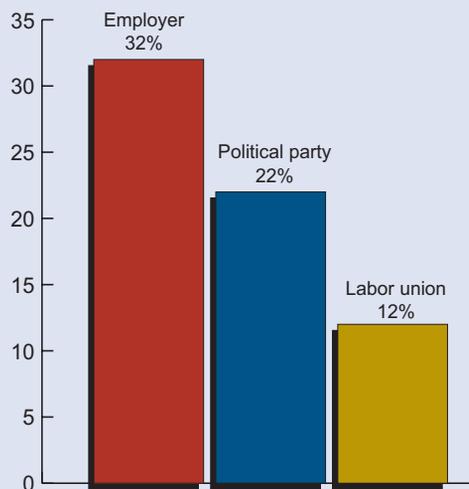
Voters in Swing Congressional Districts



Source: BIPAC (Business-Industry Political Action Committee)

What organization can provide the most credible political information?

Working Women



Source: BIPAC (Business-Industry Political Action Committee)

Florida, Chicago, Detroit, Nebraska and Detroit.

The Chamber efforts helped pro-business candidates gain two net seats in the Indiana House in 2002. IBRG has been successful in more than 83% of the races it has entered. Davis credits the state's business community for its interest and involvement. He notes, though, that for the 2002 election alone, the Indiana State Teachers Association and other labor unions spent more than \$2.5 million on direct campaign contributions.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Michael Davis at (317) 264-7544 or go to the IBRG section of www.indianachamber.com

Indiana Voter Turnout

Year	Registered Voters	Voter Turnout	Percentage Turnout
2000	4,016,440	2,245,715	55.9%
1996	3,488,088	2,195,224	62.9%
1992	3,180,157	2,347,912	73.8%
1988	2,866,339	2,222,494	77.5%
1984	3,049,590	2,268,493	74.4%
1980	2,944,311	2,275,433	77.3%
1976	3,010,439	2,278,621	75.7%
1972	3,018,578	2,126,000	70.4%
1968	3,044,186	2,123,600	69.8%
1964	2,628,627	2,091,700	79.6%

Source: Indiana Secretary of State

2000 Voter Turnout

By County

Top 10

St. Joseph – 71%
Porter – 68%
Rush – 67%
Adams – 66%
Hamilton – 65%
Harrison – 64%
Pike – 64%
Warren – 64%
Union – 63%
Carroll – 62%

Bottom 10

Monroe – 43%
Scott – 47%
Jennings – 48%
Fayette – 49%
Marion – 49%
Crawford – 50%
Vigo – 50%
Perry – 51%
Switzerland – 51%
Blackford – 52%
Dearborn – 52%
Vermillion – 52%

Source: Indiana Secretary of State