cygnal

A Cost Effective Way to Execute Actionable Polling

Executive Summary

Polling does not have to be outrageously expensive. Being open to hybrid polls (auto to landline, live to cell) and new approaches to live polls allows you to **acquire actionable survey research data in a cost efficient manner.** Automated sample collection – also known as Interactive Voice Response (IVR) – has a bad reputation in the survey research world, largely because robo-polls do not necessarily have the best track record. Various factors contribute to this problem, but most are the result of poor implementation – sloppy front-end work, inaccurate sample collection, over-dependence on weighting, and some with no weighting at all – not the automated fielding method.

For all these reasons and more, **we take a different approach** to our polling solutions. Regardless of how we collect our samples – fully automated, automated landline/live cell mix, or fully live – our results solidify the fact that **Cygnal's methodology is reliable,** as we will show throughout this paper.

We do not intend to replace traditional pollsters. Some of our best friends in the business are traditional pollsters, and we rely on them to complete more in-depth quantitative research on behalf of our clients. Rather, **it is our goal to make actionable survey research available** to every political campaign, association, IE group, and non-profit in the country so they can **spend their resources wisely.**

What we provide is useful for **candidate viability, head-to-head ballots, favorability, and basic message testing.** Our strength is pegging electoral results when other firms have trouble even getting close. The niche we have carved out is most applicable for down-ballot candidates, state legislative caucuses, associations playing in multiple races, and non-profits looking for cost effective research tools. Read on to find out why Cygnal is different, allowing us to offer **survey research starting around $3,700.**

Current Problem: Perceived Inaccuracy of Automated Sample Collection

Many shops say they can conduct polling and they utilize an automated dialing platform to gather thousands of responses from people as proof. Often they dial haphazardly forsaking the science that makes real polling viable and accurate. As voters continue to shed their landlines, IVR-only surveys in many states and districts lose their effectiveness due to their inability to provide a **representative sample.** This challenge is understandable, but it is an obstacle that can be overcome.

We do not consider ourselves in the same category as these robo-pollsters. Automated just happens to be a segment of research data collection that we can use when it makes sense. What sets us apart from these mass dialers is that **we use the correct scientific techniques utilized by survey researchers** in the traditional realm.

We also understand that an IVR approach is not always suitable to meet the goals of every survey research project. That's why we take the time to **conduct an environmental study** of the area we are researching. Considerations we look at include: cell phone-only universe size, impact of current events, and demographic breakdowns of the correct population. We then offer the best course of action for fielding – automated, hybrid, or fully live – based on what we discover in the environment.

Cygnal's Approach: Use Appropriate Collection Methods for Accurate Polling

So how do you compensate for sample bias or improper collection? Where most non-traditional pollsters go awry is taking the response of every person who completes a touchtone poll and weighting to an incorrect turnout universe, if they even go that far. Many points of failure arise using this methodology. First, the expected turnout universe must be used on the front-end to **stratify potential respondents.** Second, the survey collection must **follow the same process used in CATI-based live calls.** Third, the final **raw sample** must be close to the final weighted results. When weighting is applied to a properly conducted automated, hybrid, or live survey, the results should not drastically change.

We admittedly do not come from a polling background, but we do have statistical understanding and a wealth of experience in conducting this type of research. There are pros and cons to this approach. Our biggest advantage is that we have built a methodology for polling that correctly **anticipates turnout** and thoroughly **fills an accurate, representative sample.**
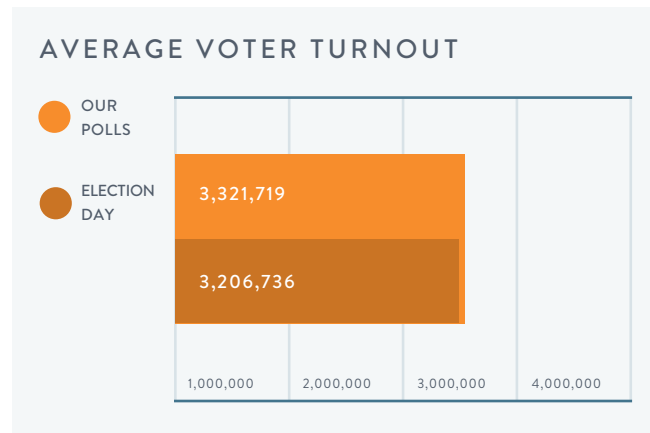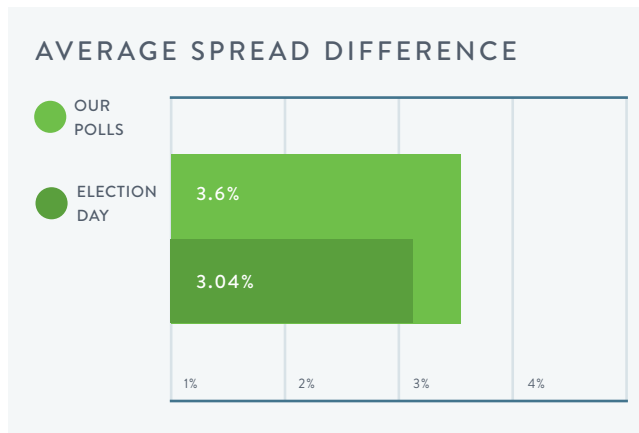
Cygnal also differentiates itself from other "non-traditional" pollsters by **adhering to rigorous checks and balances** throughout the process. Without giving away our secret sauce, it is safe to say that our established systems lead to verifiably solid results. As you will see below, **we are the outlier, and that's a good thing,** in the automated/IRV sample collection space (although most of our surveys now include some live component.)

Accurately Tracking Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin in 2014

In the month preceding the 2014 general election, we were engaged by a national GOP organization and a large state-based business group to conduct tracking polls in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Since these were statewide in scope, we utilized a hybrid method to reach landline respondents by automated call and cell phones via live operator.

In the polls for these states we measured the head-to-head races of all the major statewide offices on the ballot. The final results from these polls combined were just a **tad over-half of a point difference** from actual Election Day results. Our **turnout models for these polls were within 3% of the actual turnout,** a major feat in an off-year election.

AVERAGE SPREAD DIFFERENCE

OUR POLLS
ELECTION DAY

3.6%
3.04%

1% 2% 3% 4%

AVERAGE VOTER TURNOUT

OUR POLLS
ELECTION DAY

3,321,719
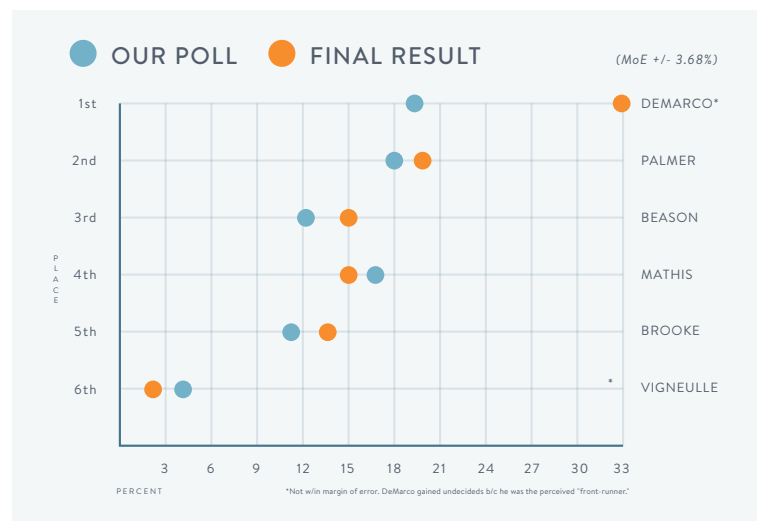3,206,736

1,000,000 2,000,000 3,000,000 4,000,000

Only Firm to Peg the 2014 AL-06 Primary & Runoff Results

No race offers better confirmation of our method than the AL-06 Republican primary and runoff. This was the most expensive and heated federal race in the state in the last two decades. Seven individuals qualified and spent millions in hopes of making a runoff. The majority of public polling data showed the race as a battle between state Rep. Paul DeMarco and either Chad Mathis or Scott Beason.

Cygnal conducted an underline automated flash poll for AL-06 and completed the results on May 24, 2014, ten days before the primary election. The results were not released until the day after the primary. We were the only firm who had Gary Palmer in second place be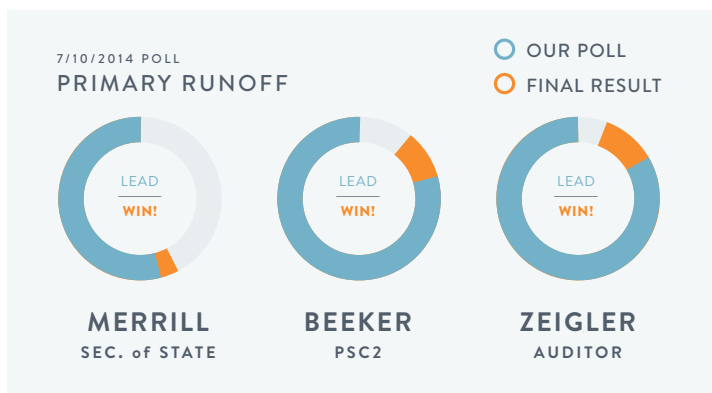hind DeMarco. **We were right.** Not only that, we pegged every candidate within the margin of error except DeMarco, which makes sense, because he was the most well-known candidate in a crowded field.

OUR POLL   FINAL RESULT   *(MoE +/- 3.68%)*

PLACE		
1st		DEMARCO*
2nd		PALMER
3rd		BEASON
4th		MATHIS
5th		BROOKE
6th	*	VIGNEULLE

3 6 9 12 15 18 21 24 27 30 33

PERCENT

Not w/in margin of error. DeMarco gained undecideds b/c he was the perceived "front-runner."

Any pollster will tell you that a partisan primary runoff is one of the most difficult types of races to peg. On July 9, 2014, we publicly released the results of our runoff poll and received skeptical media coverage: AL.com, Birmingham Business Journal, ABC 33/40, Daily Kos, and talk radio. No one could believe that Gary Palmer had gone from 13 points down to 30 points up in five weeks. We believed it, because that's what our polling showed. Palmer ended up "swamping" DeMarco by 28 points, **within the margin of our survey.**
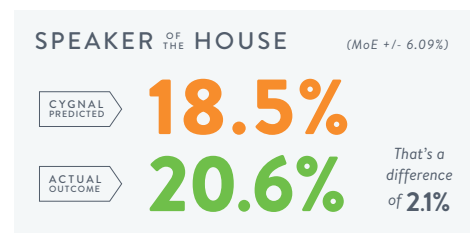
Supporting Results: Other Alabama Primaries & Runoffs

Being spot on using automated and hybrid surveys is nothing new for us. Cygnal has been polling with this methodology for over three years and honing our skills with each new survey. We had a very generous client engage us to run over thirty surveys in Alabama during the primary and runoff, so we have some strong supporting data to show **how accurate we are in smaller races as well.**

7/10/2014 POLL
PRIMARY RUNOFF

○ OUR POLL
○ FINAL RESULT

LEAD
WIN!

LEAD
WIN!

LEAD
WIN!

MERRILL
SEC. of STATE

BEEKER
PSC2

ZEIGLER
AUDITOR

We polled on July 10, 2014 for the primary runoff, showing a slim lead for John Merrill (SoS) and decent leads for Chip Beeker (PSC#2) and Jim Zeigler (Auditor). On election night, Merrill eked out a win while Beeker and Zeigler cruised to victory. **We were correct** despite showing nearly half undecided voters in the survey.
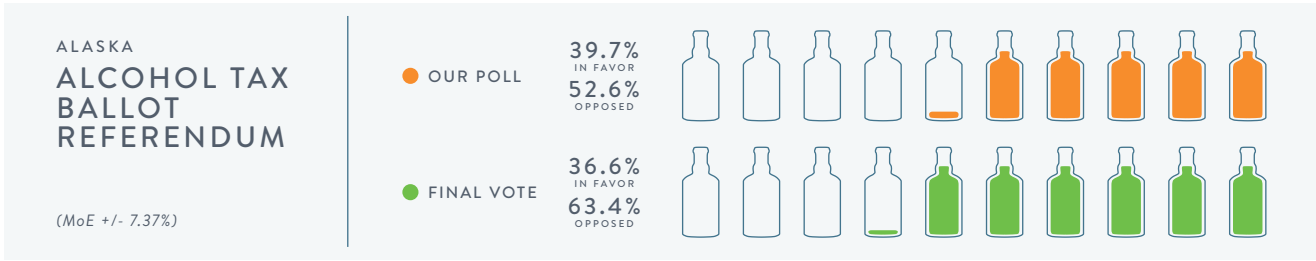
No primary race for the Alabama legislature was more fierce and expensive than that of the Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard. He spent $790k defending his seat, while his challenger, local businessman Sandy Toomer, spent $280k and had the teacher's union expend another $300k+ on Toomer's behalf. Polling results were showing extremes, so we surveyed using our hybrid methodology. The results were that the Speaker would win by 18.5%, and Election Day was not much different at 20.6%, well within the margin of error.

SPEAKER of THE HOUSE *(MoE +/- 6.09%)*

CYGNAL PREDICTED → **18.5%**

ACTUAL OUTCOME → **20.6%**

That's a difference of **2.1%**

Supporting Results: Polling Outside Alabama

Although we have conducted over one hundred polls in Alabama, Cygnal has worked from coast-to-coast. In a vast borough in Alaska, we were asked to conduct automated survey research on an alcohol tax ballot referendum. Six weeks out from the vote, we showed 39.7% support for the tax and 52.6% opposition to the tax (7.37% MoE). The final vote was 36.6% support and 63.4% oppose.

ALASKA
ALCOHOL TAX BALLOT REFERENDUM

(MoE +/- 7.37%)

● OUR POLL — 39.7% IN FAVOR / 52.6% OPPOSED

● FINAL VOTE — 36.6% IN FAVOR / 63.4% OPPOSED

In Virginia, we worked an off-year state legislative general election race. Three weeks out in VAHD012, our firm showed Delegate Yost up 8.5 points (3.46% MoE), and his final margin on Election Day was 4.9% after some local issues tightened up the race.

VIRGINIA
HEAD-TO-HEAD SPREAD

REP.
YOST
VAHD012

OUR **PREDICTION** — 8.5% 3 Weeks Out

THE **RESULT** — 4.9% Election Day

3.46% SPREAD

Much of our other work around the country thus far has been issue-based, some dealing with municipal votes where a public affairs firm needed to know public opposition to a litany of issues. Since we have a solid methodology, **where we poll is not nearly as important as how we poll.**

Our Methodology is the Secret Sauce that Makes It Work

- Start with **high quality demographic and contact data** from the population to be researched.
- Determine from the population who has the potential **likelihood to participate** in an election.
- Use that determination to **develop a random sample** to field.
- Ensure that the random sample is **stratified according to key demographic data** and fully representative of the population.
- Use the **appropriate fielding method** to collect results.
- When using automated fielding, we use professional voice recordings and tactics that **ensure maximum participation and high response rates** to gather a large, statistically relevant sample of the population.
- Supplement an adequate percentage of **cell phone-only respondents** when applicable.
- **Weight the sample** according to key demographics and geography to ensure the sample is representative of the modeled turnout electorate.
- **Compare the weighted sample to the target population** along several key indicators to ensure it matches.

This may seem light on details, and that is partially because the real secrets to our success will not be put on paper for public consumption. You'll find very few non-traditional pollsters using sound methodology to collect a sample, and we would rather not help them catch up! Statistics is a science, but **there is an art to accurate polling.** At Cygnal, we subscribe to sound, proven methods of survey research, and ours **is a product developed by experimentation, creativity, and evolution.** We are not held back by outdated practices, nor are we blinded by future possibilities that might or might not arrive someday. Obstacles to survey research are just new opportunities to excel. **We adapt, improvise, and overcome** to stay on the cusp of accurate polling.

In this tech-driven environment, data – **accurate, relevant data** – is of the utmost importance. That is why we **partner with the foremost political data company** in the world. This partnership allows us to drill down into any population to model the most likely electorate for any campaign. Combined with our ability to **understand historical significance** and "what's in play on the ground," we can draw the right population to establish a representative sample at a cost that fits nearly any budget.

Fielding the survey has a definite impact as well. Our surveys are written to eliminate bias and gather information needed to produce accurate results. We have voice professionals follow our written processes to keep response rates high. In order to enhance the fielding method, we **establish goals** according to the demographics of the population furthering our ability to collect a **pure, representative sample.**

Once the responses have been collected, the job really begins. Many outfits that offer any type of automated sample collection simply dump numbers into a dialing program and give you the totals it spits out. This is wrong, wrong, wrong! It ignores perhaps the most important component of conducting survey research – **ensuring the collected sample is representative of the population.** Cygnal **flourishes** in this area. We correctly weight the collected sample using proven techniques that cause the least amount of stress bias on the sample, thus achieving highly accurate forecasts of whatever situation we are researching.

Conclusion

Our goal throughout this white paper was to show that **highly accurate, cost-effective automated, hybrid, and live polling exists.** It's a solution that we make available to organizations and groups who otherwise couldn't afford traditional research. Cygnal is different, in a good way, and we are ready to help your campaign or organization **conduct survey research that leads to making better decisions.**