

Carolina Governor David Beasley in a hard-fought race for governor that centered on the issue of video poker, then a \$2.5 billion dollar business in South Carolina. Declaring video poker to be a "cancer" on the state, leaving "troubled children, broken homes and overwhelmed social agencies," Beasley campaigned to have video poker outlawed.⁶³ Hodges, a former critic of video gambling, said the issue of video poker's continued legality should be

put to a public referendum. Hodges also came out in favor of a state lottery as a way of raising money for education.⁶⁴ Video poker, while lucrative for vendors, produces only \$60 million per year for the state of South Carolina through a franchise tax. A state share of more than 30 cents per dollar spent on lottery tickets would yield a much larger take.

While campaign disclosure laws don't require parties to report their soft money receipts, news

What the Polls Say About Public Support for a State Lottery in North Carolina

Polls dating back to the 1980s have consistently shown that North Carolinians favor a state lottery. Support hovers around 60 percent but rises to about 70 percent when the question links using lottery proceeds for public education.

In January and February of 2000, for example, KPC Research of Charlotte, N.C., asked 1,020 residents about support for a state lottery as part of the "Your Voice, Your Vote" survey intended to help guide coverage of the 2000 election for 15 media organizations statewide.¹ Respondents were asked, "Would you support or oppose a state lottery for North Carolina if the profits were used for public education? Of those who answered (3 percent refused), 70 percent said they would support a lottery for that purpose, 27 percent said they would not, and 3 percent said they were not sure. The poll had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.1 percent.

A question on the fall 1999 Carolina Poll, conducted by the School of Journalism and the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was worded similarly but *did not mention earmarking the profits for public education.*² Of the 714 persons responding, 62 percent said they supported a state lottery, 31 percent were opposed, and 7 percent said they did not know or declined to answer. The margin of sampling error for this poll was 3.7 percent.

The Carolina Poll, conducted each spring and fall, has asked about support for a state lottery numerous times over the past two decades,

yielding fairly consistent results. The poll features a random telephone sample of adult North Carolinians with respondents within the household selected randomly by asking for the adult with the nearest birthday. The survey uses an unweighted sample, meaning the results are not adjusted to account for any underrepresentation of subgroups in the population. In the fall of 1990, respondents were told, "Here are some questions about other issues in the news. Do you support or oppose a state lottery in North Carolina?" Of 822 respondents, 61 percent said they supported a state lottery, while 24 percent said they were opposed. An additional 12 percent said they didn't know, and 2 percent did not answer. (Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3.4 percent) The question regarding a state lottery was worded identically in the fall of 1989. In that poll, 66 percent of 634 respondents said they would support a lottery, while 25 percent were opposed. An additional 8 percent said they did not know, and 1 percent did not answer. (Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3.9 percent.) The 1989 poll was conducted about one year after institution of the Virginia lottery in September 1988. This might have accounted for a slight increase in support (66 percent) compared to other years in which the Carolina Poll question did not mention using the proceeds for education.

And finally, in 1983, the Carolina Poll asked, "Some people have proposed that North Carolina hold a lottery to raise money for state government expenses. Do you think a state lot-

reports state that video poker interests spent heavily to defeat Beasley. *USA Today*, in a systematic analysis of the campaign, estimates that video poker interests spent at least \$3 million in direct and indirect giving (issue ads, bumper stickers and billboards) on the South Carolina race.⁶⁵ Compared to video poker, lottery-related spending in the state has thus far been modest, though the vote on whether to amend the South Carolina Constitution to allow a

lottery is still months away. Two multinational lottery firms, Rhode Island-based GTECH and Montana-based Automated Wagering International spent some \$135,000 in South Carolina in 1999, according to published reports.⁶⁶ Of that amount, Automated Wagering International donated \$10,000 to the state Democratic Party and \$3,500 to Gov. Jim Hodges' campaign for reelection in 2002. The remainder went to Columbia, S.C., lobbying firms.

tery would be a good idea or a bad idea?" Some 59 percent of the 599 respondents said a state lottery would be a good idea, while 28 percent said it would be a bad idea, and 13 percent said they did not know. (Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 4 percent.)

But if polls have shown consistent support for a state lottery in North Carolina, another important issue is intensity of support. While this is difficult to measure, a number of polls have made the attempt. A March 1998 Carolina Poll set the question up thusly: "Some people favor a state lottery to raise revenue for the North Carolina educational system. Other people oppose a lottery on moral or economic grounds. Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose a state lottery with the revenue used to support education?" Of the 370 persons responding, 29 percent said they strongly favored a state lottery, 41 percent said they favored a lottery, 16 percent opposed a lottery, and 10 percent strongly opposed a lottery. A total of 4 percent said they did not know or did not answer. (Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 5 percent.)

The Chapel Hill, N.C., polling firm FGI asked the question differently in May 1994 and got somewhat different results.³ In a poll sponsored by *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, N.C., a total of 608 North Carolina residents were asked, "Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose a state lottery?" About 48 percent said they strongly favored a state lottery, while 16 percent somewhat favored a state lottery. Of those opposed, about 10 percent were somewhat op-

posed, while 22 percent were strongly opposed. Another 4 percent said they did not know or did not answer. (Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 4 percent.)

Because the track record of public support for a state lottery is strong in North Carolina, most lottery legislative proposals call for a vote of the people in a statewide referendum. That's the poll that really counts. While lottery referenda of various stripes have passed across the nation, the last statewide vote, which came in November 1999 in Alabama, was a loser, 54%-46%.

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTES

¹ Information on the "Your Voice Your Vote" poll is taken from www.yvyy.com. The Your Voice Your Vote project is a consortium of broadcast and print media outlets that use a poll to determine what voters are concerned about in a particular election year, then attempts to tailor campaign coverage to address those concerns. Such efforts to involve the public in coverage are discussed in Tom Mather, "Civic Journalism: Strengthening the Media's Ties With the Public," *North Carolina Insight*, N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, Raleigh, N.C., Vol. 15, No. 4/Vol. 16, No. 1, March 1995, pp. 70-87.

² The Carolina Poll is a joint project of the School of Journalism and the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Poll results are accessible through the IRSS data archive at www.irss.unc.edu. All Carolina Poll results mentioned in this article are taken from this source.

³ IRSS data archive at www.irss.unc.edu. Similar to the Carolina Poll, this poll featured a random telephone sample, with adults selected within households using the nearest birthday method. The results were adjusted to balance male and female responses.

Mike McLaughlin is editor of North Carolina Insight.