

UMass Lowell-Boston Herald poll
Massachusetts Special Election Senate Race 2013
June 15-19, 2013

N=608 MA registered voters, including 312 identified as likely voters with a sampling error +/- 4 percentage points for all RVs, +/- 5.6 percentage points for likely voters

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- **Head to Head:** Ed Markey, the Democrat from Malden, MA, appears to have consolidated his lead over Cohasset businessman and former Navy Seal, Gabriel Gomez, in the race to replace John Kerry in the US Senate. The special election is scheduled for June 25, 2013. Markey leads Gomez 56% to 36% among likely voters with 7% undecided and 53% to 32% among registered voters. In our March 2013 poll, when 85% of voters either had no opinion of, or had not heard of Gomez, Markey led by 19.5 percentage points. Markey also enjoys greater stability in support, with 76% of Markey voters saying that this is a firm choice, while 67% of Gomez voters say that their choice is firm. That leaves a considerable number of voters who report that they could still change their mind (24% of Markey voters; 33% of Gomez voters). However, given the size of Markey's lead, Gomez requires a significant event if he hopes to change the trajectory of this race in its last week.
- **Demographic Breakdown:** Markey leads Gomez in every gender, age, education, income and racial subcategory. Notably, he leads by 29 percentage points among women (57-28), compared to a 12 percentage point lead among men (48-36).
- **Partisan Advantage in Massachusetts:** As is a theme in most MA elections, Republican candidates have to overcome a significant party registration and identification advantage in order to win. They must generate higher turnout among Republican identifiers and must convince Democrats and Independent leaning Democrats to cross over. Consistent with our previous surveys, Democratic identifiers (and independents who lean to the Democratic Party) outnumber Republicans by approximately 20 percentage points. In a typical statewide election, the Democratic candidate starts with a 20 point lead. Our poll shows that Gomez has been unable to tap into the Democratic base, and among unleaned Independents, Gomez only leads Markey 41% to 39%.
- **Voter Turnout:** Predicting turnout in special elections is difficult as little statistically valid precedent typically exists. However, in the January 2010 MA Senate Special Election, turnout mirrored typical mid-term turnout in the Bay State, with 54% of registered voters turning out to vote; turnout was 48% of the total eligible electorate. We anticipate that turnout is likely to be somewhat lower in 2013 since the race does not appear to have

garnered the same level of national attention, nor does it appear to be as competitive. From our survey of registered voters, we generated two likely voter models, one in which turnout is just above 50% of registered voters, and another where it is closer to 75% of registered voters. The high turnout model predicts a 21 percentage point advantage compared to the 20 percentage point advantage in the expected turnout model. Markey's lead is outside the margin of error in the registered voter model and both likely voter models.

- ***Candidate Characteristics:*** Markey's favorability rating has increased from 31% in March to 48% in June, while those saying they have an unfavorable impression of him increased from 20% to 22% of registered voters. Meanwhile, Gomez, who was relatively unknown in March (Favorable 9% to unfavorable 6%) is now known by 93% of voters. Gomez is viewed favorably by 34% of registered voters and unfavorably by 33% of registered voters. Candidates typically experience an increase in unfavorable ratings as a campaign wears on, but the increase in Gomez's unfavorables without any statistical change in Markey's unfavorables suggests that Markey's large campaign spending advantage has taken a toll on Gomez's popularity with the electorate. In addition, 33% of registered voters view Gomez as 'too conservative' while 24% view Markey as 'too liberal.' Among independents, 26% view Gomez as 'too conservative' while 38% view Markey as 'too liberal.' Finally, when asked whether it was more important for a candidate for the US Senate to have prior experience or to be a political outsider, 43% said 'prior experience' to 32% who said 'political outsider,' with 24% unsure.
- ***Did the Debate Make a Difference?*** Candidates Markey and Gomez engaged in a feisty and spirited debate on Tuesday, June 18th. Our survey includes 152 interviews completed after the debate concluded on Wednesday June 19th, allowing us to assess if either candidate gained momentum. Among respondents interviewed from 6/15 through 6/18 Markey leads Gomez 55% to 31% with 11% of voters undecided. Among respondents interviewed after on 6/19, Markey leads Gomez 47% to 34% with 18% of voters undecided. The trend is not statistically significant, meaning we cannot reject the notion that this variation could be due to random sampling error. However, the trend supports the claims of Gomez supporters that he helped himself with the debate. Gomez's underlying support did not increase, but the number of undecided voters did increase by 7 points.
- ***It's Still the Economy:*** Survey respondents were asked to rate the most important issues in politics today and could choose up to 3 answers. The economy received top billing with 34% of registered voters saying the economy was the most important issue and 27% saying jobs. Meanwhile, of the issues frequently discussed in the campaign, only 7% cited environmental issues, 10% cited gun laws, and 12% cited illegal immigration. Additionally, asked separately, 65% of MA registered voters favor a federal ban on assault weapons compared to 27% who oppose. Among Republicans, 49% favor such a ban, with 41% against the ban.
- ***Trust in Government:*** A great deal of media attention has been given to recent scandals and many have posited declining trust in government. In our March poll, we observed near record lows in trust in the federal government with just 12% of registered voters saying the federal government could be trusted 'just about always' or 'most of the time.' The percentage of Massachusetts registered voters who now say that the federal government can be trusted

'just about always' or 'most of the time' is up to 30%. To be sure, 59% say that the federal government can be trusted 'only some of the time' and 10% say 'never.' It appears, however, that the budget, threatened government shutdown, and sequester debate had a far greater negative short term impact in March than have the recent alleged scandals of the Obama administration. Trust in state government is also up at 44% trusting, from 28% in March.

- **Obama Job Approval:** Obama remains quite popular in the Bay State, with 61% of MA RVs saying that they strongly or somewhat approve of the way the President is handling his job. Congress does not fare nearly as well; on 24% strongly or somewhat approve of the way they are handling their job. Markey is winning 80% of those who approve of Obama, and 36% of those who disapprove of the President's job performance suggesting that there is a national character to this race.
- **Political Scandals:** Respondents were also asked about their awareness of the issues that the Obama administration has been dealing with the media. Nearly 60% of registered voters report that they are following coverage of these issues very closely (25%) or moderately closely (34%), with Republicans 15 percentage points more likely than Democrats to report they are following the issues very closely. When asked which issue is most concerning, 12% of MA RVs said IRS targeting of tea party groups, 18% said Benghazi, 12% said press surveillance and 33% said NSA spying/surveillance, while 17% said none of the above and 7% were unsure.
- **Warren and Patrick both viewed favorably:** Elizabeth Warren and Deval Patrick have both seen their favorability numbers increase since March with Warren viewed favorably by 63% of MA RVs and Patrick viewed favorably by 63% of MA RVs. The increased favorability ratings are likely due to overall increases in trust in government. For Patrick, whatever hit his approval rating took for his controversial tax plan appears to have subsided.
- **Gubernatorial Candidates:** With the MA Gubernatorial contest just 18 months away, we also asked respondents about the favorability of Scott Brown, Charlie Baker and Steve Grossman. Brown's rating has taken a bit of a hit down from 60% in March to 49%, although his net favorability rating (favorable-unfavorable) is still +18%. Grossman has a net favorability rating of +2, while Baker has a net favorability rating of +3. However, both are still relatively unknown to the MA electorate: 39% have never heard of Grossman and 31% have never heard of Baker.