

TO: Interested Parties
FR: Lincoln Park Strategies
RE: Senate PAAR 2014: A Look Back
DATE: April 29, 2015

Last July we released our PAAR (Percent Above Anticipated Result) [projections](#) for the 2014 Senate elections and now we wanted to take a look back and see how those projections stood up to reality. As a reminder, these projections were based upon [our thesis](#) that as elections are more and more nationalized and voters are increasingly locked into their partisan preferences, demographic changes within the electorate ultimately play the deciding factor in electoral outcomes. PAAR does not attempt to make exact predictions for every race, but instead is used to illustrate which candidates exceed or fall short of baseline expectations. We believe that by recognizing those candidates and campaigns that did or did not live up to expectations, we can help identify new strategies for upcoming elections and manufacturing future wins.

Said more directly, we need to stop viewing wins as the only measure of success. Similar to baseball moving away from home runs, batting average, and runs batted in as the only measures of a player's worth, campaigns need to move away from only viewing a well-run campaign as a campaign that wins, with no other context placed around the results.

PROJECTED VS. ACTUAL RESULTS

As with the [2012 election](#), the projections made in July of last year by the 2014 PAAR model closely matched the outcomes of actual election results. We [projected](#) four months ahead of the November elections that Democrats should lose majority control of the Senate, with Democrats and Independents holding 47 seats versus 53 seats for the Republicans. The actual final result was 46 seats for Democrats and Independents, and 54 seats for Republicans. The model predicted Democratic wins in Iowa and Colorado, and also missed on the call for a Republican to win in New Hampshire (which we had favored by 0.25%).

For a model that relies on no information (such as polling, fundraising, or most of the other factors that are often taken into account in traditional electoral projections) about any candidate besides whether they are an incumbent or not, these results are not only an impressive display of PAAR's predictive ability, but they are a testament to how fundamentally important demographic changes of the electorate are to the outcomes of elections.

The Senate PAAR results are also impressive when compared to the [other projection models](#) out there. Of the eight most notable electoral projections, all of them predicted Republicans having between 51



and 53 Senate seats. Only the Washington Post and Daily Kos models predicted 53 seats for Republicans. All of these models had daily polls to use as inputs, and most still failed to match PAAR’s predictive ability four months after the fact.

Back in May of 2014, [Princeton Professor Sam Wang wrote an article](#) assessing the various types of projection models. There was a wide range of variability in the predictions at the time, with his model predicting only a 33 percent chance Republicans would take over the Senate, and the Washington Post’s Monkey Cage predicting a 77 percent chance for a Republican takeover. Wang came down strongly in favor of polling-only models, which is how his model is structured, as opposed to the more “fundamentals” approach that our model and the Washington Post used.

In the aftermath of the election, it is evident that Professor Wang was too hasty in dismissing the utility of the fundamentals-based models, as the PAAR model and the Washington Post’s came the closest to predicting the actual final Senate composition. Meanwhile, Professor Wang’s model ending up well off target (it projected only a [five percent chance](#) that Democrats would end up with just 46 seats).

The problem many models ran into this election was that [many polls were substantially off from](#) the final result. In fact, if you compared the Real Clear Politics polling average on the last day of the election, the absolute value of the error was 6.1% for Republicans, and 3.5% for Democrats. This was actually worse than the absolute value of the difference between our PAAR projections and the final result. We had a difference of 3.9% for Republicans and 4.2% for Democrats. Even among the closest races that were most heavily polled, the PAAR model still held up reasonably well.

State	Democrat Actual	Republican Actual	Democrat Anticipated	Republican Anticipated	Democrat Polling Average	Republican Polling Average
IA	44%	52%	49.6%	45.5%	45.7%	48.0%
LA	44%	56%	46.0%	49.0%	36.8%	57.0%
GA	45%	53%	42.4%	56.8%	44.8%	47.8%
AK	46%	48%	40.5%	51.0%	43.8%	46.2%
CO	46%	48%	52.5%	44.8%	44.0%	46.5%
NC	47%	49%	48.6%	50.2%	44.1%	43.4%
VA	49%	48%	51.8%	43.3%	48.5%	38.8%
NH	52%	48%	49.1%	49.4%	48.8%	48.0%

For a model that was created as a fairly straightforward tool to illustrate successful candidates and campaigns, the PAAR model outperformed many of its competitor models this election cycle.

With PAAR holding its own on predicted results versus actual results, let's move on to the campaigns that exceeded expectations.

CANDIDATE HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS

Though voters are becoming increasingly hardened in their partisan preferences (which actually improves the accuracy of the PAAR model), we can still use it to point out the candidates and campaigns that excelled and exceeded expectations given the terrain they were competing on.

Unfortunately for Democrats, very few candidates exceeded baseline expectations. One of the few that actually did was former Senator Mark Begich. In our July piece, we dismissed Begich's chances for re-election, even though he was leading in the polls at the time. We predicted the bottom would fall out because Alaska is extremely unfriendly territory for a Democrat, and because Begich barely won in 2008. While we were correct that Begich would end up losing, he held easily the best PAAR score of any Democrat in the 2014 election with a PAAR score of +5.3.

Additionally Greg Orman¹ in Kansas had the highest positive PAAR score at 10.8. While Senator Pat Roberts is back in Washington DC for another six years, Orman was able to drop Roberts an astronomical 12 points below what a Republican candidate was expected to receive in 2014. Governor Sam Brownback and some self-imposed mistakes clearly helped Orman, yet the campaign deserves full accolades for having the second highest PAAR score from both parties.

The other positive Democratic result of note might surprise some who followed the polls closely. In the weeks preceding the election, the conversation was about whether or not Michelle Nunn could win the Georgia Senate seat [without a runoff](#). Even as the polls showed that increasingly unlikely, the conventional wisdom was that the race would [at least go to](#) a run off in January. Instead, Perdue beat Nunn 53% to 45% to easily avoid a runoff. Although Nunn underperformed the expectations of her team and backers, she actually exceeded the fundamentals of her state, coming in with a PAAR of +2.8. The only other Democrats with a positive score were Nels Mitchell, Jeanne Shaheen, Jack Reed, and Jeff Merkley².

¹ Orman ran as an Independent, however, since there was no Democratic candidate, we applied the Democratic PAAR score to Orman.

² See Index for complete list of state by state results

While Democrats only had seven candidates exceed PAAR, Republicans had 15 candidates with a PAAR score in the black. A dozen candidates had a PAAR of three points or higher, meaning over a third of the Republican candidates swung their races in their favor by at least three percentage points above expectations. Needless to say, three percentage points can make all the difference in swing races. This shows once again what a great year it was for Republicans across the country. It wasn't simply that the polls missed how well Republicans were going to do, but that Republicans ran better than generic Republicans could be expected to in race after race.

The candidate with the highest PAAR score of this cycle (and tied for the third best PAAR score since we created the metric) is Senator Susan Collins of Maine. The secret to getting a high PAAR score is clearly to be a moderate candidate, as Joe Manchin, Claire McCaskill, Susan Collins, Scott Brown (in Massachusetts), and Amy Klobuchar have the five best PAARs over time. Susan Collins' easy reelection is a nice assurance that we have not completely moved to a [parliamentary approach to Congressional voting](#), and that candidates and their policies can still matter.

Though unconventional at times, Joni Ernst may have run the most impressive campaign of the election. Our model favored Bruce Braley's chances to win in Iowa, but the combination of [his gaffes](#) and Ernst's strong campaigning sealed an impressive margin of victory for Ernst. She gained notoriety for her [campaign ads](#), but the Ernst campaign won [accolades](#) for all facets of its effort.

Kansas Senator Pat Roberts earned the lowest PAAR score in a victory of -12.0. He barely managed to win his primary and was dogged by concerns that he did not care about Kansas, yet the deep red of Kansas was still enough for him to limp over the finish line.

The other lowest PAAR scores were not so lucky. Former Senator Mark Pryor lost what many thought would be a competitive race in Arkansas by 17 points, and earned a -10.1 PAAR score. It was the same story for Former Senator Mark Udall, who was surprisingly easily dispatched by Cory Gardner in Colorado. Udall's PAAR was -6.2.

At the beginning of the campaign season, [Republican Terri Lynn Land](#) in Michigan and [Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes](#) were seen as candidates that could pull off shocking upsets. However, by the end of the campaign it was clear that both were not going to [meet expectations](#), and both actually ended up with negative PAAR scores of -3.1 and -2.7, respectively.

IMPLICATIONS

Back in our August preview, we pointed out that the 2014 Senate map heavily favored Republicans. Our PAAR model predicted that generic Republicans running against generic Democrats would result in Republicans ending with 53 seats and 47 for Democrats. Republicans, through nominating better candidates,



and catching up to some of the Democrats' successful strategies over the last few cycles, were finally able to overachieve expectations, allowing them to start the new Congressional year with 54 seats. Democrats must not become complacent in 2016 and assume simply because it will be a more favorable electoral map that they will win back the Senate. Good candidates and well run campaigns are still needed to exceed expectations. Additionally, we need to start discussing what campaigns that exceed expectations did to make this happen, regardless of whether or not they won or lost. On the flip side, let's not just look at those campaigns that won and mark them as a success story without looking at why they failed to meet expectations.

INDEX I

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES

State	Democrat Candidate	Democrat Results	Democrat Prediction	PAAR	State	Democrat Candidate	Democrat Results	Democrat Prediction	PAAR
KS	Greg Orman (Ind) ³	42.5%	31.7%	10.8 %	TN	Gordon Ball	31.8%	33.9%	-2.1%
AK	Mark Begich	45.8%	40.5%	5.3%	MS	Travis Childers	37.9%	40.1%	-2.2%
ID	Nels Mitchell	34.7%	31.0%	3.7%	KY	Alison Lundergan Grimes	40.7%	43.4%	-2.7%
GA	Michelle Nunn	45.2%	42.4%	2.8%	VA	Mark Warner	42.5%	51.8%	-2.7%
NH	Jeanne Shaheen	51.5%	49.1%	2.4%	OK (spec)	Constance Johnson	29.0%	32.1%	-3.1%
RI	Jack Reed	70.6%	68.8%	1.8%	OK	Matt Silverstein	28.5%	32.1%	-3.6%
OR	Jeff Merkley	55.7%	54.9%	0.8%	NM	Tom Udall	55.6%	59.6%	-4.0%
MN	Al Franken	53.2%	53.4%	-0.2%	DE	Chris Coons	55.8%	60.4%	-4.6%
SC	Brad Hutto	37.6%	38.0%	-0.4%	IA	Bruce Braley	43.8%	49.6%	-5.8%
MI	Gary Peters	54.6%	55.3%	-0.7%	CO	Mark Udall	46.3%	52.5%	-6.2%
SC (spec)	Joyce Dickerson	37.1%	38.0%	-0.9%	IL	Richard Durbin	53.5%	60.0%	-6.5%
MA	Ed Markey	59.0%	59.9%	-0.9%	NE	Dave Domina	31.5%	39.3%	-7.8%
HI (spec)	Brian Schatz	69.8%	70.8%	-1.0%	WY	Charlie Hardy	17.4%	25.8%	-8.4%
NJ	Cory Booker	55.8%	56.9%	-1.1%	AR	Mark Pryor	39.5%	49.6%	-10.1%
NC	Kay Hagan	47.3%	48.6%	-1.3%	SD	Rick Weiland	29.5%	41.8%	-12.3%
LA	Mary Landrieu	44.1%	46.0%	-1.9%	ME	Shenna Bellows	30.8%	44.3%	-13.5%

³ Greg Orman ran as an Independent for Senate in Kansas but we have included him with the Democrats since there was no Democratic candidate.

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES

State	Republican Candidate	Republican Results	Rep Prediction	PAAR	State	Republican Candidate	Republican Results	Rep Prediction	PAAR
ME	Susan Collins	67.0%	55.0%	12.0%	OK	Jim Inhofe	68.0%	68.6%	-0.6%
LA	Bill Cassidy	55.9%	49.0%	6.9%	OK (spec)	James Lankford	67.9%	68.6%	-0.7%
IA	Joni Ernst	52.1%	45.5%	6.6%	NH	Scott Brown	48.2%	49.4%	-1.2%
AR	Tom Cotton	56.5%	50.5%	6.0%	NC	Thom Tillis	48.8%	50.2%	-1.4%
NE	Ben Sasse	64.4%	59.0%	5.4%	KY	Mitch McConnell	56.2%	57.6%	-1.4%
VA	Ed Gillespie	48.3%	43.3%	5.1%	MS	Thad Cochran	59.9%	61.6%	-1.7%
DE	Kevin Wade	42.2%	37.8%	4.5%	HI (spec)	Cam Cavasso	26.5%	28.3%	-1.8%
WY	Mike Enzi	72.2%	68.0%	4.2%	TN	Lamar Alexander	61.9%	64.8%	-2.9%
NM	Allen Weh	44.4%	40.6%	3.8%	RI	Mark Zaccaria	29.2%	32.2%	-3.0%
CO	Cory Gardner	48.2%	44.8%	3.5%	AK	Dan Sullivan	48.0%	51.0%	-3.0%
IL	Jim Oberweis	42.7%	39.3%	3.5%	MA	Brian Herr	36.2%	39.3%	-3.1%
MI	Terri Lynn Land	41.3%	38.2%	3.1%	GA	David Perdue	52.9%	56.8%	-3.9%
MN	Mike McFadden	42.9%	40.8%	2.1%	OR	Monica Wehby	36.9%	42.4%	-5.5%
NJ	Jeff Bell	42.3%	41.8%	0.5%	SC	Lindsey Graham	55.3%	61.0%	-5.7%
SC (spec)	Tim Scott	61.1%	61.0%	0.1%	SD	Mike Rounds	50.4%	58.7%	-8.3%
ID	Jim Risch	65.3%	65.5%	-0.2%	KS	Pat Roberts	53.3%	65.3%	-12.0%