

[How Carter Beat Reagan](#)

By [Jeffrey Lord](#) on 9.25.12 @ 6:10AM

The American Spectator

Washington Post admits polling was "in-kind contribution"; *New York Times* agenda polling.

Dick Morris is right.

[Here's](#) his column on "Why the Polls Understate the Romney Vote." Here's something Dick Morris doesn't mention. And he's charitable. Remember when Jimmy Carter beat Ronald Reagan in 1980? That's right. Jimmy Carter beat Ronald Reagan in 1980.

In a series of nine stories in 1980 on "Crucial States" --battleground states as they are known today -- the *New York Times* repeatedly told readers then-President Carter was in a close and decidedly winnable race with the former California governor. And used polling data from the *New York Times*/CBS polls to back up its stories.

Four years later, it was the *Washington Post* that played the polling game -- and when called out by Reagan campaign manager Ed Rollins a famous *Post* executive called his paper's polling an "in-kind contribution to the Mondale campaign." Mondale, of course, being then-President Reagan's 1984 opponent and Carter's vice president.

All of which will doubtless serve as a reminder of just how blatantly polling data is manipulated by liberal media -- used essentially as a political weapon to support the liberal of the moment, whether Jimmy Carter in 1980, Walter Mondale in 1984 -- or Barack Obama in 2012.

First the *Times* in 1980 and how it played the polling game. The states involved, and the datelines for the stories:

- **California** -- October 6, 1980
- **Texas** -- October 8, 1980
- **Pennsylvania** -- October 10, 1980
- **Illinois** -- October 13, 1980
- **Ohio** -- October 15, 1980
- **New Jersey** -- October 16, 1980
- **Florida** -- October 19, 1980
- **New York** -- October 21, 1980
- **Michigan** -- October 23, 1980

Of these nine only one was depicted as "likely" for Reagan: Reagan's own California. A second -- New Jersey -- was presented as a state that "appears to support" Reagan. The *Times* led their readers to believe that each of the remaining seven states were "close" -- or the *Times* had Carter leading outright. In every single case the *Times* was proven grossly wrong on election day. Reagan in fact carried every one of the nine states.

Here is how the *Times* played the game with the seven of the nine states in question.

- **Texas:** In a story datelined October 8 from Houston, the *Times* headlined:

Texas Looming as a Close Battle Between President and Reagan

The Reagan-Carter race in Texas, the paper claimed, had "*suddenly tightened and now shapes up as a close, bruising battle to the finish.*" The paper said "*a New York Times/CBS News Poll, the second of seven in crucial big states, showing the Reagan-Carter race now a virtual dead heat despite a string of earlier polls on both sides that had shown the state leaning toward Mr. Reagan.*"

The narrative? It was like the famous scene in the *Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy and her friends stare in astonishment as dog Toto pulls back the curtain in the wizard's lair to reveal merely a man bellowing through a microphone. Causing the startled "wizard" caught in the act to frantically start yelling, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!" In the case of the *Times* in its look at Texas in October of 1980 the paper dismissed "a string of earlier polls on both sides" that repeatedly showed Texas going for Reagan. Instead, the *Times* presented this data:

A survey of 1,050 registered voters, weighted to form a probable electorate, gave Mr. Carter 40 percent support, Mr. Reagan 39 percent, John. B. Anderson, the independent candidate, 3 percent, and 18 percent were undecided. The survey, conducted by telephone from Oct. 1 to Oct. 6, has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

In other words, the race in Texas is close, assures the *Times*, with Carter actually in the lead.

What happened? Reagan beat Carter by over 13 points. It wasn't even close to close.

- **Pennsylvania:** The next "Crucial States" story focused on Pennsylvania on October 10. Here the headline read:

Undecided Voters May Prove Key

Reagan, said the *Times*, "appears to have failed thus far to establish many positive reasons for voting for him."

Once again the paper played the polling data card, this time saying Reagan had a mere 2 point lead. But the Reagan lead was quickly disputed in series of clever ways.

Fundraising for Reagan wasn't as good as expected, said the *Times*, and besides the budget for a Reagan telephone bank being shaved "from \$700,000 to \$400,000." The *Times*/CBS poll showed that Carter was ahead of Reagan 36-32 among union households in a heavily labor state. To make matters worse for Reagan the GOP Senate candidate Arlen Specter was being "swamped" in the polls by his Democratic rival, the former Pittsburgh Mayor Pete Flaherty -- with Specter losing to Flaherty 47-36. Not to mention Reagan was being trounced in Philadelphia 52-15 percent. Towards the very end of the story was this interesting line -- a line that should have some relevance to the Romney campaign as President Obama struggles with the consequences of the killing of the American Ambassador in Libya. Reads the sentence:

One negative reason [meaning an anti-Carter vote] that did not turn up in the telephone poll but came up repeatedly in door-to-door interviews was the hostage situation in Iran.

What happened? The race wasn't close, with Reagan beating Carter in Pennsylvania not by barely 2 points but rather trouncing him by over 7 points. And Arlen Specter beat Pete Flaherty.

• **Illinois:** The *Times* headline here in a story October 13?

Poll Finds Illinois Too Close to Call: Both Camps Note Gains by Carter

The narrative for Illinois? Carter is gaining, so much so that:

...uncertainty about Ronald Reagan's leadership, especially among suburban voters, [has] apparently set back Mr. Reagan's hope for a victory in Illinois and left his campaign scrambling to regain lost momentum, according to advisers in both camps.

Then came the usual *New York Times*/CBS polling data that proclaimed a Reagan one-point lead of 34% to Carter's 33% as a sure sign that "Carter Gains and Reagan Slips in Close Illinois Race" -- as an inside page headline proclaimed.

What happened? Reagan beat Carter by almost 8 points, 49.65% to 41.72%. Again, there was no "close" race as the *Times* had claimed.

• **Ohio:** The headline in this "Crucial States" profile once again conforms to the *Times* pattern of declaring Reagan and Carter to be in a "close" race.

Ohio Race Expected to Be Close As Labor Mobilizes for President

The narrative for Ohio? Ohio, the paper explained, had been "*long viewed by Ronald Reagan's campaign as its best opportunity to capture a major Northern state*" but "*such a victory ...is not yet in hand.*" Then came the inevitable *New York Times*/CBS polling data. Reagan was ahead by a bare 2 points, 36% to 34%. Two-thirds of the undecided were women and Reagan was doing "much worse among women voters than men." Carter on the other hand had the great news that "35 percent of the undecided

came from labor union households, a group that divides nearly 2-1 for Mr. Carter among those who have made up their minds."

What happened? Reagan beat Carter by over 10 points in Ohio. Yet another "crucial state" race wasn't even close to being close as the paper had insisted.

- **Florida:** For once, the problem was impossible to hide. The *Times* headline for its October 19 story headlined:

Carter Is in Trouble With Voters In Two Major Sections of Florida

There was no *New York Times*/CBS poll here. But what was published was "the most recent Florida Newspapers Poll" that showed Reagan with only a 2 point lead over Carter: 42 for Reagan, 40 for Carter, with 7 for Anderson. The election, said the *Times* confidently, "was widely expected to be close." Surprise!

What happened? Reagan beat Carter in Florida by over 17 points.

- **New York:** The *Times* headline for its home state in a story dated October 21?

President is in the Lead, Especially in the City --Anderson Slide Noted

The *Times* waxed enthusiastic about New York. Reagan was "being hindered by doubts within his own party." And it trotted out its favorite *New York Times*/CBS Poll to show definitively that Reagan was getting clobbered in New York. The poll, said the *Times*, "showed Mr. Carter leading in the state with 38%, to 29% for Mr. Reagan...." Which is to say, Carter was running away with New York state, leading Reagan by 9 points. The headline on the inside of the paper:

Reagan Far from Goal in New York; Carter in Lead

Why was this so? Why was Reagan doing so badly in New York? The paper turned to a Carter campaign aide in the state who explained that New Yorkers aren't "*willing to vote for a Goldwater.*" Then they found one "*frustrated Republican county chairman*" who said the problem with Reagan was that New Yorkers "*don't like what they think they know about him.*" Then there was the usual yada-yada: Reagan was failing miserably with women (losing 41-23 said the poll) and losing in New York City, not to mention that "labor is hard at work" for Carter.

What happened? Reagan beat Carter in New York by over 2 points.

• **Michigan:** The last of the profiles in the *Times* "Crucial States" series was Michigan, published on October 23. The ambiguous headline:

Party Defections May Tip Scales in Michigan Vote

The Michigan story begins with the tale of Reagan being endorsed by Dr. Martin Luther King's famous aide the Reverend Ralph Abernathy. But the *Times* immediately saw a problem in this backing of Reagan from a prominent "black civil rights leader." The problem? Black backlash. Said the paper:

Mr. Reagan was barely out of town [Detroit] before the backlash set in.

"The Abernathy Betrayal," screamed the headline over the chief article in *The Michigan Chronicle*, a black newspaper. And yesterday the 400-member Council of Black Pastors, in the greater Detroit area, broke its precedent of refraining from Presidential endorsements and declared its support for President Carter a direct reaction to the Abernathy endorsement.

In other words, Reagan was damned because he didn't get black support -- and damned especially when he did. Grudgingly, the paper admitted that "although the race was close" in Michigan, "Mr. Reagan was ahead." But once again, the *Times* insisted that a key state race was close. Close, you see, close. Did they mention it was close?

What happened? Reagan carried Michigan by over 6 points, 48.999 to Carter's 42.50. Yet again -- it wasn't close.

That same day, October 23, the paper ran a second polling story on the general status of the presidential election, its theme self-evident:

Poll Shows President Has Pulled To Even Position With Reagan.

The story by *Times* reporter Hedrick Smith began this way:

In an election campaign reminiscent of the tight, seesaw contest of 1960, President Carter has pulled to an essentially even position with Ronald Reagan over the last month by attracting some wavering Democrats and gaining on his rival among independents, according to a new nationwide survey by *The New York Times* and CBS News.

The survey, readers were assured, was "weighted to project a probable electorate" and had Carter leading Reagan 39-38.

As if the point hadn't been driven home enough, seven days later on October 30 the *Times* decided to sum up the entire race in the light of the just completed Reagan-Carter debate. Can you guess what they said? That's right:

Carter and Reagan Voicing Confidence on Debate Showing: Performances Rated Close

And inside the paper the continuation of the story proclaimed --guess what?

Outcome of Debate Rated as Close.

On November 4 -- the day before the election -- the *Times* proclaimed... proclaimed...Yup:

Race is Viewed as Very Close

The final results?

Ronald Reagan clobbered Jimmy Carter winning 51.7% to Carter's 41% -- a 10 point-plus victory in the popular vote. Third place Congressman John Anderson managed a mere 6.6%.

In the Electoral College? Reagan carried 44 states for a total of 489 votes. Carter won 6 states plus the District of Columbia for 49 electoral votes. To say the least, the race wasn't "close." To compare it to 1960 as a "tight, seesaw contest" was in fact not simply ridiculously untrue but bizarre. So what do we have here?

What we have is the liberal "paper of record" systematically presenting the 1980 Reagan-Carter election in 9 "Crucial States" as somehow "close" in five of the nine -- Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Florida and Michigan. New York was in the bag for Carter. Only in his own California and New Jersey was Reagan clearly leading. The actual results had only New York "close" -- with Reagan winning by 2. Reagan carried every other "close" state by a minimum of 6 points and as much 17 -- Florida. Florida, in fact, went for Reagan by a point more than California and about 4 more than New Jersey.

How could the *New York Times* -- its much ballyhooed polling data and all of its resulting stories proclaiming everything to be "close" -- been so massively, continuously wrong? In the case of its "Crucial States" -- nine out of nine times? The obvious answer is called to mind by a polling story from four years later involving Ronald Reagan and his next opponent, Jimmy Carter's vice president Walter Mondale.

By 1984, Reagan was an extremely popular incumbent president. He was running well everywhere against Mondale. But suddenly, up popped a curious *Washington Post* poll that indicated Reagan's 1980 margin of over 16% in California had dropped precipitously to single digits. Nancy Reagan was alarmed, calling campaign manager Ed Rollins (full disclosure, my former boss) and saying, "You have to do something."

Rollins disagreed, as he later wrote in his memoirs [*Bare Knuckles and Back Rooms: My Life in American Politics*](#).

A Californian himself Rollins was certain Reagan was just fine in California. The Reagan campaign's own polls (run by Reagan's longtime pollster Dick Wirthlin) showed Reagan with a "rock-solid" lead. After all, said Rollins, "Californians knew Ronald Reagan, and either loved him or hated him. He'd been on the ballot there six times and never lost." The *Post* poll data made no sense. But Mrs. Reagan was insistent, so Rollins ordered up another (expensive) poll from Dick Wirthlin. Rollins also dispatched longtime Reagan aide and former White House political director Lyn Nofziger, a Californian as well, back to the Reagan home precincts. More phone banks were ordered up. In all, a million dollars of campaign money that could have been spent on Minnesota -- Mondale's home state where the ex-Minnesota Senator was, remarkably, struggling -- was spent on California because of the *Washington Post* poll.

A few weeks later, the *Washington Post* ran a story that confirmed Rollins' initial beliefs. The *Post* confessed that... well... oops... it had made a mistake with those California polling numbers. Shortly afterward came the November election, with California once again giving Reagan a more than 16 point victory. In fact, Reagan carried 49 states, winning the greatest landslide victory in presidential history while losing Minnesota in -- yes -- a close race. Mondale had 49.72% to Reagan's 49.54%, a difference of .18% that might have been changed by all that money that went into California; making Reagan the first president in history to win all fifty states.

After the election, Ed Rollins ran into the *Washington Post*'s blunt-speaking editor Ben Bradlee and "harassed" Bradlee "about his paper's lousy polling methodology." Bradlee's "unrepentant" response? "Tough sh...t, Rollins, I'm glad it cost you plenty. It's my in-kind contribution to the Mondale campaign."

Got that? So the questions for 2012.

How corrupt are all these polls showing Obama leading or in a "close race"? Are they to Obama what that California poll of the *Washington Post* was for Walter Mondale -- an "in-kind contribution"? Is that in fact what was going on with the *New York Times* in 1980? An "in-kind contribution" to the Carter campaign from the *Times*?

What can explain all these polls today -- like the ones discussed [here](#) at NBC where the Obama media cheerleaders make their TV home? Polls that the Obama media groupies insist show Obama 1 point up in Florida or 4 points in North Carolina or 5 points in Pennsylvania. And so on and so on.

How does one explain a president who, like Jimmy Carter in 1980, is increasingly seen as a disaster in both economic and foreign policy? How does a President Obama, with a Gallup job approval rating currently at 49% -- down a full 20% from 2009 -- mysteriously win the day in all these polls?

How does this happen? Can you say "in-kind contribution"?