

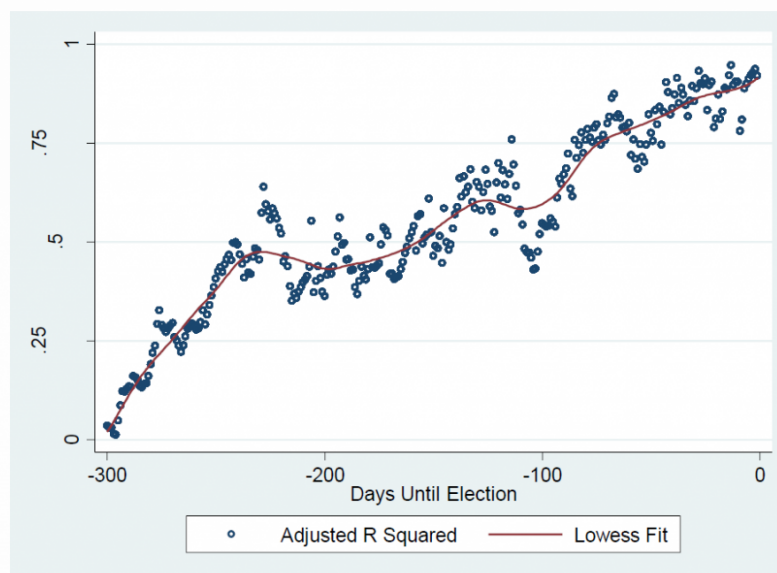
## Polling News & Notes

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**Early Polls Have Little Predictive Value:** Earlier this year, *New York Times* blogger [Nate Silver](#) used historical polling data to argue the '12 Republican primary field is less popular than previous years' fields, claiming, "Even at this early stage, polls tell us something—not everything, not a lot, but *something*—about how the candidates are liable to be perceived next year following the primaries." But how well does Silver's claim hold up?

In a forthcoming book, political scientists [Chris Wlezien and Robert Erikson](#) have compiled polls from 1956 to 2008 to see how well surveys at varying points in the election cycle forecast the eventual outcome. Using a regression of their forecasting model, Wlezien and Erikson created the graph below, showing the accuracy of polls from 300 days before the election to Election Day itself. Polls that were more accurate predictors of the election outcome score closer to 1.0, while those that had no predictive value score closer to 0.0.

**Predictive Value of Pre-Election Polls Over Time (1956-2008)**



**Figure 5.6.** Adjusted *R*-squared predicting the Democratic vote from the Democratic vote division in the polls, by the date in the campaign timeline starting 300 days before Election Day. For eleven elections with polls going back 300 days, 1956-1964, 1980-2008. Daily polls are interpolated where missing. Lowess fit is with a bandwidth of .20.

The predictive value of polls increased when they were conducted closer to the election, however, it's important to note polls taken 300 days before the election had almost no predictive value. Today, there are 523 days until Election Day 2012. In the past, polls did not start having significant predictive value until about 200 days before the election, or mid-February of the election year. Not coincidentally, that's around the same time the parties select their nominees.

Early polls contain useful information about how Americans view the presidential race today, but early polls the year before the election don't provide much help in forecasting the campaign's actual outcome.