

The Arkansas Poll, 2000

Summary Report

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Political Party and Ideology

Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

For Independents: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?

How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as a Liberal, Moderate, or Conservative?

Ballot Issues

Amendment 1 allows city and county governments in Arkansas to form redevelopment districts in economically deteriorated areas in order to finance improvements in the area. The proposal also allows local governments to borrow money to pay for certain big-ticket items .. like road-grading equipment, for example. Given this description, do you favor or oppose this issue?

Amendment 2 relates to the property tax. It gives taxpayers a credit of up to \$300 toward their homestead property taxes. It also limits the amount that a person's property tax could increase in a given year and prohibits a property tax increase on property owned by elderly or disabled persons. Finally, to offset the revenue that would be lost, the legislature would increase the state sales taxes by half cent if this amendment passes. Given this description, do you favor or oppose this measure?

Amendment 3 would revise the part of the Arkansas Constitution that deals with our court system. Some of the changes include switching our current method of choosing judges from partisan elections - in which candidates run as Democrats or Republicans - to nonpartisan elections - in which party affiliations are not identified. The amendment also would merge our multiple trial-level courts into a single court. Given this description, do you favor or oppose this measure?

Another issue Arkansas citizens are being asked to consider involves how we will use our share of the recent tobacco settlement money. The proposal contains many provisions including saving some of the money in a trust fund, giving some of it to state universities for conducting health-related research or training, and using some of it to expand health programs. Given this description, do you favor or oppose this measure?

Finally, there is also a proposal to establish a state lottery, permit charitable bingo, and allow casino gambling in certain Arkansas counties. The proposal establishes a state Gaming Commission to regulate gambling activities, and dedicates a portion of the proceeds to reducing or eliminating the sales tax on groceries and to providing money for education. Given this description, do you favor or oppose this measure?

And, overall, do you think that statewide ballot measures such as amendments and initiatives are a good thing for the state, a bad thing, or that they don't make much difference?

Education Questions

First, school voucher plans generally refer to school reforms in which public funds will be used to help parents send their children to non-public schools. These plans can take various forms. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements about school vouchers: I support the adoption of School Voucher Plans in some form.

If Agree with Vouchers: Voucher Plans should NOT be used at schools sponsored by religious organizations.

If Agree on Vouchers: Voucher Plans should be targeted ONLY to low-income families who cannot

afford to choose a non-public school.

To Public School Parents: Would you send your child to a private school if vouchers were made available?

Still thinking about education, school officials throughout the nation are debating the usefulness of teacher pay plans in which raises are based, to some extent, on measures of student performance. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements about teacher pay: Teacher pay raises should be connected to student performance.

If agree with performance pay: When pay raises for teachers are based on student performance, circumstances such as student poverty should be taken into account.

All Respondents: Standardized test results are a good measure of student academic performance.

Parents of school children: Standardized tests are causing undue stress and anxiety for children in school.

Parents only: Does your child/children attend public school or private school?

How good are school across the US, across the state, your district and your school?

In the chart above, parents of school age children were the only respondents asked how good “you school” is.

ARKANSAS POLL: Focus on Education

Respondents’ Views on Voucher Programs:

- Overall, 50% of those polled supported the adoption of voucher programs in one form or another. This is roughly aligned with national survey findings on this subject. However, it is important to note that responses differ depending on the way in which the question is asked, and many Americans are uninformed about voucher programs (63% of Americans claim to know little or nothing about such programs).
- Various survey subgroups were particularly likely to favor voucher programs: males (56%) were more likely than females (45%); respondents with school-aged children (57%) were more likely than those without (46%); parents of children in private school (89%) were far more likely than parents of those in public school (52%); respondents who attended church at least several times per year (52%) were more likely than those who did not (39%); respondents who identified themselves as conservative (61%) were more likely than those who called themselves moderate (48%) or liberal (40%). It is interesting to note that there was no significant relationship between the respondent’s beliefs about the quality of the community school and the likelihood of that respondent to favor voucher programs.

- Of those respondents willing to consider the use of voucher programs, just over one-third (37%) believed that such programs should be targeted only to low-income families. Respondents with household income levels under \$25,000 were most likely to give this response (49%), as were those with education levels of high school or below (48%). Respondents with annual income levels from \$25,000 to \$75,000, who identified as conservative (62%), who claimed that they would vote this year (56%), and who attended religious services regularly were most likely to disagree with programs targeted only to low-income families.
- Of those respondents willing to consider the use of voucher programs, most (70%) believed that vouchers should be permitted for use in religious schools. This view was held most strongly by regular church attendees, respondents identified as conservative, and those who claimed that they would vote this year.
- Finally, 40% of the poll's respondents indicated that they would send their children to a private school if vouchers were made available. A comparable question in national polls ask parents whether they would send their children to private schools if they could afford the tuition; to this question, approximately 60% of the respondents say they would choose private schools in this case. Respondents who indicated that their children's school was either adequate or poor were far more likely to favor a move to private schools (55%) than those who believed that the school was excellent or good (33%). Moreover, respondents with annual household incomes below \$25,000 were most likely to favor a move to private schools if vouchers made it possible.

Respondents' Views on Merit Pay Programs for Teachers:

- A majority of respondents (52%) believe that teacher pay raises should be related to student performance. This is roughly aligned with national survey findings on this subject, which find that a majority of parents, and employers, support such merit pay programs, while fewer than one-quarter of teachers nationally support similar plans.
- Various survey subgroups were particularly likely to favor merit pay programs: males (61%) were more likely than females (46%); white respondents (55%) were more likely than non-white respondents (40%); respondents without a college degree (57%) were more likely than those with a college degree (44%); respondents without school-age children (54%) were more likely than those with school-age children (49%); respondents who identified themselves as conservative (57%) were more likely than those who called themselves moderate (53%) or liberal (43%).
- Of those respondents willing to consider the implementation of merit-pay programs, more than half (57%) believed that the poverty level of the school should be a consideration when basing teacher raises on student performance. In fact, several of the merit-pay schemes currently in existence or under consideration in various states attempt to account for differences in socioeconomic status by tying rewards to *improvements* in student performance, as compared to absolute level of student performance. Respondents who identified as liberal (73%) were more likely than those identified as conservative (51%) to advocate that student poverty be considered.

Respondents' Views on Standardized Testing:

- Following the questions on merit pay programs, respondents were asked whether standardized tests were a good measure of student performance. Overall, more than three-fifths of the respondents (61%) believe that such tests are a good measure. This is roughly aligned with national survey findings on this subject, in which about half of the respondents indicate that these tests measure important skills and that schools place just about the right emphasis on testing. However, it is important to note that national responses appear to differ to some extent depending on the way in which the question is asked.
- Subgroups of respondents most likely to agree that standardized tests are a good measure of student performance include: males (65%), those with a high school diploma or less (68%), those with school-aged children (69%), and those identified as conservative (66%).
- More than three-fifths of the respondents (61%) with school-aged children also believe that such tests are not causing undue stress and anxiety for children in school. Again, this echoes the sentiment of a recent national survey by Public Agenda (2000) which found that only 11% of parents say their children must take too many tests.
- While only 39% of the respondents with school-aged children believed that standardized tests cause undue stress, some subgroups of respondents were more likely to agree that the tests do cause stress. These groups include: females (44%), those with a high school diploma or less (49%), and those identified as liberal (49%).

Respondents' Views on the Quality of Schools:

- National polls consistently have shown that the closer the people get to the public schools, the higher the grades they assign those schools. Generally, survey respondents give relatively low ratings to public schools nationally (which the public knows only through the media), give a little better marks to schools statewide, still better ratings of local schools, and very good ratings to the particular school attended by their own children. Arkansans do not deviate from this trend!
- Of the respondents with school-aged children, just over one-third of the respondents gave ratings of good or excellent to schools nationwide (34%) or statewide (37%), half (50%) gave good or excellent ratings to local district schools, while seven in ten gave such high marks to the schools attended by these children (70%).

Current Issues

I would like to start by asking you which of the following issues you think is the most important problem facing people in Arkansas today. The issues are [READ LIST WITH ROTATION]. Which of these do you think is most important?

And would you say that you are better off financially, worse off, or about the same compared to a year ago?

How about narrowing the gap in income between the rich and the poor? Do you favor or oppose policies that narrow the gap between the richest people and the poorest?

Moving on to some other policy issues, please consider the following: Some people say that

because of past discrimination, racial and other ethnic minorities should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion is wrong because it gives people advantages they haven't earned. What about your opinion - are you FOR or AGAINST preferential hiring and promotion of historically disadvantaged minorities?

Similarly, some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of minorities. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort because people should help themselves. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 indicates that government should make every effort to help minorities, and 1 indicates that government should not make such efforts, where would you place yourself, or haven't you thought much about this?

And, do you favor or oppose passing a Constitutional Amendment which makes it illegal to burn the American flag?

Would you say you favor stricter gun control, less strict gun control, or should no change be made to existing gun control laws?

Note: In fall 1999, respondents were not exactly offered a "no change" option. This is the primary reason for the difference in the two year's results.

Political Life

On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the U.S.? Would you say you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied?

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington, DC to do what is right? Just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

We could elect the US Congress so parties supported by, say, 20% of voters would hold 20% of the seats. This would make it more likely that an additional party could get some representation in Congress. Would you support changing things so an additional party receives some seats, or leaving things as they are with 2 large parties holding all of the seats?

Generally speaking, how much input should you have in the political system? More than you have now, about the same as you have now, or less than you have now?

Political Approval

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Mike Huckabee is handling his job as governor?

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Gore/George W. Bush?

SAMPLE INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

Between October 17th and October 25th, the Survey Research Center at the University of Arkansas dialed 3,914 randomly selected Arkansas telephone numbers. These attempts yielded 775 completed surveys. The remainder of the surveys were not completed due to the resident's absence, a refusal to participate, a busy line, a "no longer in service" message, or the resident being under the age of 18 years. Employing guidelines established by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, the poll's cooperation rate was 47.2%. This figure reflects completed surveys as a percentage of all eligible individuals contacted. The survey's margin of error is + 3 percent.

To ensure that the sample drawn for the survey was representative of the state's residents, the Arkansas Poll

team opts to publish what many polling organizations do not: a comparison of the survey respondents' demographic characteristics to those of the state as a whole. The results are shown in the table below.