

Akron Buckeye Poll, April 2006

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Executive Summary

The Akron Buckeye Poll finds Secretary of State Ken Blackwell leading Attorney General Jim Petro in the Republican primary, while Congressman Ted Strickland is far ahead of former state legislator Brian Flannery in the Democratic primary.

In general election trial heats, Strickland had a slight lead over both Blackwell and Petro.

Three-fifths of Ohioans favor the Democrats taking control of state government and one-third favor Republicans maintaining control.

Two-fifths of Ohioans say corruption is a “serious problem” and 38 percent said it would motivate them to vote in the fall general election.

A large majority of Ohioans favor the Tax Expenditure Limitation (TEL) constitutional amendment in principle. However, the public knows little about the proposal, with just 15 percent having heard or read something about it. However, 28 percent said it would motivate them to vote in the general election.

On balance, Ohioans have a favorable view of religious groups in politics and a less favorable view of groups who want to keep religion out of politics.

The Survey

This report is based on a survey of a random sample of Ohio adult citizens interviewed by telephone between February 20th and March 25th, 2006 at The University of Akron Survey Research Center. The number of respondents was 1,075 and the overall margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. (Smaller sub-samples have higher margins of error, such as like primary or general election voters.)

Findings

The 2006 Ohio Gubernatorial Primaries. Among registered voters who planned to vote in the Republican primary, 39.3 percent favored Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell and 32.0 percent favored Attorney General Jim Petro, with the remaining 28.7 percent undecided. Thus, Blackwell held a 7.3 percentage point lead. (The margin of error for the sub-sample of likely Republican primary voters is plus or minus 5 percentage points.)

Among registered voters who planned to vote in the Democratic primary, 48.3 percent favored Congressman Ted Strickland, 8.5 percent favored former state legislator Brian Flannery, and 43.2 percent were undecided.

These figures must be viewed with extreme caution because the primary campaigns are not yet completed. In addition, it is very difficult to predict turnout in primary elections.

However, based on these figures, one can conclude that after the first half of the primary campaign, the Republicans have a competitive race and the Democrats do not.

Except for region, there were few demographic differences between the Blackwell and Petro voters in the survey (Blackwell voters were more common in the southwestern portion of the state and Petro voters in the northeast.)

Instead, the major difference was based on ideology: 46 percent of Blackwell's voters claimed to be "very conservative" compared to 32 percent of Petro voters. On the other hand, 26 percent of Petro's voters called themselves "moderate" compared to 14 percent of Blackwell's voters. The two candidates had about the same percentage of votes who called themselves "somewhat conservative" (35 percent for Blackwell and 38 percent for Petro).

The undecided Republican primary voters were 39 percent "moderate," 31 percent "somewhat conservative," and 21 percent "very conservative." (The remaining 9 percent had other ideological identifications.)

General Election Trial Heats. The respondents were asked about two trial heats among gubernatorial candidates for the fall general election, a choice between Democrat Ted Strickland and Republican Ken Blackwell, and a choice between Democrat Strickland and Republican Jim Petro.

Among likely voters in the general election, Strickland led both trial heats by a small margin. In the first trial heat, Strickland had the support of 37.9 percent of respondents and Blackwell the support of 32.8 percent, with 29 percent undecided. Thus, Strickland had a lead of 5.1 percent.

In the second trial heat, Strickland had the support of 32.0 percent of respondents and Petro 28.3 percent, with 39.7 percent undecided. Thus, Strickland had a margin of 3.7

percent. One difference between the trials was the larger number of undecided voters in the Strickland-Petro trial heat. (The margin of error on the sub-sample of likely general election voters was plus or minus four percentage points.)

These figures must be viewed with great caution since much can change by the fall of 2006. However, taken as a whole, these trial heats suggest a close contest in the November general election.

Partisan Control of State Government. All the respondents were asked the following question:

The Republicans have controlled Ohio state government for most of the last sixteen years. This year would you like to see the Republicans remain in control of state government or would you like to see the Democrats take control of state government?

The answer to this question provides a rough quantification of the effect of scandal on the political climate in Ohio.

Overall, 59.0 percent of respondents said they prefer the Democrats to take control of state government, 33.6 percent want the Republicans to remain in control of state government, and 7.4 percent were undecided.

As one might expect, Democrats are eager for their party to gain control of state government, with 96 percent favoring a change. In contrast, 80 percent of Republicans want their party to stay in control.

However, the decisive figures are found with the independents: 62 percent want the Democrats rather than the Republicans in control of state government.

In terms of ideology, 86 percent of liberals want the Democrats to take control of state government and so do 70 percent of moderates. Meanwhile, 59 percent of conservatives want the Republicans to stay in office.

The respondents who wanted Democratic control of state government were then asked why: 58 percent said because “The Republicans have done a poor job and deserve to be replaced”; 27 percent because “The Democrats have better ideas and policies than the Republicans”; and 15 percent because “The Democrats have the best qualified candidates.”

Likewise, respondents who wanted Republican control of state government were then asked why: 13 percent said because “The Republicans have done a good job and deserve to remain in office,” 61 percent because “The Republicans have better ideas and policies than the Democrats”; and 26 percent because “The Republicans have the best qualified candidates.”

Relating the figures on partisan change to the trial heats is instructive. In both cases, some 70 percent of the respondents who picked Strickland over Blackwell or Petro said they wanted a change in state government because the Republicans had done a “poor job and deserve to be replaced.” However, many fewer of the Strickland supporters said the Democrats had better policies or candidates than the Republicans--roughly fifteen percent each.

In contrast, large majorities of respondents who picked Blackwell and Petro over Strickland said that the Republicans should retain control of state government because they had better policies (63 and 67 percent, respectively) or because they had better qualified candidates (30 and 27 percent, respectively).

These figures suggest that the political environment in Ohio favors the Democrats. However, the Democrats appear not have convinced most Ohioans that they have the ideas or personnel to govern effectively. In contrast, the Republican candidates appear to have an advantage in this regard.

The Corruption Issue. Respondents were asked how serious a problem corruption was in Ohio politics. Some 42 percent said it was “a serious problem” and another 47 percent said it was “somewhat of a problem,” with the remaining 11 percent saying it was “not a serious problem.”

These figures differ somewhat from the Akron Buckeye Poll in November 2005 when 52 percent of Ohioans said corruption was “a serious problem,” 38 percent said it was “somewhat of a problem,” and 10 percent “not a problem.” This shift in opinion suggests that the impact of the state government scandals may have declined somewhat.

In the present survey, respondents were also asked if the corruption issue would motivate them to vote in the general election. Overall, 38 percent of the respondents said it would be “very motivating,” 31 percent said it would be “somewhat motivating,” and the remaining 31 percent said it would not motivate them to vote in the fall.

One-third of the respondents could be called “corruption-motivated voters”: they said corruption was a serious problem and that it would be “very motivating” or “somewhat motivating” for their vote in the general election.

Of these “corruption-motivated voters,” 77 percent said they wanted the Democrats to take control of state government (compared to 17 percent who wanted the Republicans to remain in office). However, these “corruption-motivated voters” made up only 43 percent of all respondents who want a partisan change in Columbus.

In terms of the general election trial heats, 50 percent of those who chose Strickland over Blackwell were “corruption-motivated voters” as were 44 percent of those who chose Strickland over Petro. However, these “corruption-motivated voters” accounted for only 35 percent of Strickland’s voters in both trial heats.

These “corruption-motivated voters” made up 47 percent of Democratic voters, 30 percent of Independents, and 21 percent of Republicans. They also accounted for 44 percent of liberal voters; 31 percent of moderates, and 29 percent of conservatives.

The Tax Expenditure Limitation Amendment. A Tax Expenditure Limitation (TEL) amendment to the Ohio Constitution is scheduled to be on the ballot in the 2006 general election.

In the present survey, the TEL was described as follows:

Now I would like to ask you about a constitutional amendment that is scheduled to be on the ballot in November of 2006. It would limit the increase in state government spending in any year to the rate of inflation plus population increase, or 3.5 percent, whichever is higher, unless a majority of the voters authorize a larger increase.

Relatively few Ohioans know about the TEL: just 15 percent reported they have read or heard something about it. This figure is up modestly from the 10 percent who reported hearing about the TEL in the Akron Buckeye Poll in November 2005.

In the present survey, 39.2 percent of these “knowledgeable” respondents favored the TEL, 25.4 percent opposed it, and 35.4 percent were undecided.

Support was down a bit from the Akron Buckeye Poll in November 2005, when 41.7 percent supported the TEL, 24.1 percent opposed it, and 34.3 percent were undecided.

Put another way, 61 percent of respondents who were aware of the TEL and had an opinion supported it in the present survey, down slightly from 64 percent in the fall of 2005.

However, the Ohioans were quite supportive of the TEL in principle. All respondents were asked:

With regard to the state spending limitation amendment, which of the following statements comes CLOSEST to your view?

A state spending limitation is a good idea because it will keep taxes from going up OR

A state spending limitation is a bad idea because it will require cuts in public services

On this question, 67 percent of the respondents said the TEL was a good idea because it will “keep taxes down,” while 33 percent opposed it because it would require “cuts in public services.”

The respondents were also asked another related item:

With regard to the state spending limitation amendment, which of the following statements comes CLOSEST to your view?

A state spending limitation is a bad idea because it will damage crucial government programs OR

A state spending limitation is a good idea because it will eliminate wasteful government spending

On this question, 77 percent of the respondents said that the TEL was a good idea because it will “eliminate wasteful government spending,” and 23 percent thought it was a bad idea because it would “damage crucial government programs.”

In addition, the poll asked respondents how motivated they would be to vote in the fall election because of the TEL. Overall, 28 percent said the TEL would be “highly motivating,” 36 percent said it would be “somewhat motivating,” and 36 percent said it would not motivate them to vote.

More than one-third of the respondents can be labeled “TEL-motivated voters”: voters who supported the TEL in principle and said it was either “very motivating” or “somewhat motivating” to their vote in the general election.

The “Tel-motivated” and “corruption-motivated voters” were about as numerous (35 and 33 percent, respectively). This pattern occurs because more people favor the TEL in principle than believe corruption is a “serious problem.”

These “TEL-motivated voters” accounted for 45 percent of those who would like Republicans to maintain control of state government. They also accounted for about one-third of those who would like Democrats to take control of state government.

“TEL-motivated voters” accounted for 50 percent of the voters who chose Blackwell or Petro over Strickland in the trial heats. They also account for about 40 percent of voters who were undecided in both trial heats. However, such voters were less than one-quarter of the Strickland supporters.

These “TEL-motivated voters” made up 43 percent of all Republicans, but were also common among independents and Democrats, each at 31 percent. They also accounted for 41 percent of conservatives, 33 percent of moderates, and 28 percent of liberals.

Possible Budget Reductions. Critics of the TEL believe it will require reductions in state spending on crucial programs. Most of the poll respondents do not appear to agree with this criticism. However, the respondents were asked the following question:

If the state spending limitation amendment passed and DID require state budget reductions, would you favor or oppose a reduction in the following areas?

The attached table reports the percentage of respondents who favor or oppose budget cuts in six major areas of state government spending *if required* by the passage of the TEL:

Budget areas	Favor cuts	Oppose cuts
Medicare, nursing homes	13.6	86.4
Public school	16.5	83.5
Law enforcement, prisons	23.2	76.8
Assistance to the poor	30.9	69.1
Highways and bridges	34.0	66.0
Economic development	34.8	65.2

The first thing to notice is that a majority of the respondents oppose cuts in all six areas.

Budget cuts were the least popular in programs for the elderly (Medicare and nursing homes) and for the public schools, where cuts were favored by one-sixth or less of the respondents if necessary.

Law enforcement came next with less than one-quarter favoring budget reductions if necessary, followed by assistance to the poor, with three out of ten in favor. Highways and economic development programs came last, with about one-third in favor of reductions if necessary.

Wrong Track Ohio. Overall, 64 percent of the respondents believe the state is on the “wrong track” and just 36 percent believe it is on the “right track.”

This discontent is widespread: by a margin of 70 to 30 percent, the respondents report that the state’s economy is on the “wrong track”; and by a margin of 60 to 40 percent that the state’s “moral climate” is on the “wrong track” as well.

Each of these negative perceptions was strongly associated with the desire for partisan change in state government.

For example, 80 percent of those who want the Democrats to take control of state government said the state’s economy was on the “wrong track.” Likewise, respondents who said the state’s moral climate was “on the wrong track” made up 64 percent of those who wanted a partisan change in Columbus.

In terms of the general election trial heats, more than four-fifths of respondents that chose Strickland over Blackwell or Petro said the economy was on the “wrong track” and roughly two-thirds said the moral climate was on the “wrong track.”

In contrast, just 43 percent of respondents who want Democratic control of state government reported being motivated to vote by the corruption issue (see above for more details).

Respondents who chose Blackwell or Petro over Strickland in the trial heats were roughly evenly divided between those who saw the state on the “wrong” or “right track.” These figures are comparable in size to the 45 percent of those who want Republicans to remain in office and are “TEL-motivated voters.”

These figures suggest that policy concerns may be as important to the general election gubernatorial campaign as the corruption issue or the TEL. Thus, the candidates’ policy stands may be critical to the outcome.

Religious Groups in Ohio Politics. The respondents were asked their views on two kinds of groups now active in Ohio politics. The first kind of group includes organizations of conservative Christians, like the Ohio Restoration Project and the Christian Coalition, who want to restore traditional values to Ohio government.

What is your overall opinion of religious groups that seek to restore traditional morality to Ohio Government?

Very favorable	25.3
Mostly favorable	26.6
No opinion	21.9
Mostly unfavorable	15.3
Very unfavorable	10.9
Total	100.0

On balance, Ohioans have a positive view of this kind of group, with more than one-half of the respondents having favorable views and a little more than one-third having unfavorable ones.

The second kind of group includes organizations who oppose the involvement of religion and traditional morality in politics, such as People for the American Way and the ACLU.

What is your overall opinion of political groups that seek to keep religion and traditional morality out of politics in Ohio?

Very favorable	13.5
Mostly favorable	18.3
No opinion	20.6
Mostly unfavorable	22.3
Very unfavorable	25.3
Total	100.0

Ohioans had less favorable views of these groups, with less than one-third having unfavorable views and almost one-half having favorable views.

As one might expect, religious affiliation is an important factor behind these numbers, with evangelical Protestants and regular worship attenders having favorable views of the first group and unfavorable views of the second.

Likewise, non-religious people and less regular worship attenders held the opposite views. Conservatives and Republicans tend to favor traditionally religious groups, while liberals and Democrats tend to favor the groups opposed to religion in politics.