



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2015

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Arkansas Poll Finds Little Shift in State Partisanship, Notable Shifts on Issues

Arkansas voters named the economy as the most important issue they face, while crime and taxes concerned just 4 percent of those polled.

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – The 17th annual Arkansas Poll found an electorate more pessimistic about the economy and more optimistic about healthcare than in previous years while the majority of respondents also said they have an unfavorable opinion of the healthcare reform law.

The 2015 Arkansas Poll focused on state services and national issues, looking at trends in ideology and policy opinions among voters. Sponsored by the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society at the University of Arkansas, the poll was conducted statewide Oct. 19 through Oct. 25, and included 800 live telephone interviews with voters, 200 of which were to cell phones.

The poll was designed and analyzed by Janine Parry, professor of political science at the University of Arkansas. The Arkansas Poll has a track record over its 17-year history of coming within 2 points of actual election outcomes. The full 2015 Arkansas Poll Summary Report, protocol information historic outcomes can be found [here](#).

Partisan figures remained steady in this poll as in recent past polls, with 27 percent of respondents identifying as Republican, 32 percent identifying as Democrat and 32 percent identifying as independent.

When asked about their party affiliation, 42 percent of independents said they identify more with Republicans, 23 percent said they identify more with Democrats and 30 percent said they are strictly independent.

“What’s interesting, though,” Parry noted, “is once again – in fact since 2010 – those independents, when pressed, identify themselves as closer to the Republican party. But that’s where they remain. In light of recent election results, I keep waiting for the proportion of straight-up Republican identifiers to increase. But it really doesn’t move much.”

The poll tested leanings in the 2016 presidential race, with 42 percent of voters saying they would most likely vote Republican if the presidential election were to be held today. About a quarter of respondents said they didn’t know how they’d vote and 32 percent said they’d vote for a Democrat.

Approval ratings for Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., remained consistent with previous years at 38 percent. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., received 45 percent approval rating by voters as the end of his first year in office draws to a close. And 57 percent of respondents said they approved of Gov. Asa Hutchinson.

Medical marijuana represented the largest shift in opinion over recent years. In 2012, 44 percent of respondents in that year’s poll said they approved of a ballot measure allowing marijuana use for medical purposes and 52 percent opposed it. A ballot measure on the topic failed that year by an even closer margin. In this year’s poll, answering a generic question about the subject, 68 percent of respondents said they were in favor of the measure with 26 percent opposing.

The poll also tested satisfaction with state services for the first time since 2003, finding satisfaction dipping only slightly in the last 12 years across the board.

- 40 percent were satisfied with the condition of roads/highways
- 78 percent were satisfied with parks and recreation facilities
- 71 percent were satisfied with colleges and universities
- 27 percent were satisfied with the welfare system
- 54 percent were satisfied with K-12 schools
- 50 percent were satisfied with tax-funded services

The poll also tested issues including abortion, gun control, immigration and climate change.

Arkansans surpassed national trends in general support of the death penalty, with 71 percent in favor, compared with 61 percent in the latest national Gallup poll. However, support differs by gender and by race. More men than women support the death penalty — 78 percent to 67 percent — and more whites than minorities — 76 percent to 50 percent.

When given a choice between offering sentences of death penalty and life in prison, 57 percent of respondents preferred the death penalty with 31 percent preferring life in prison. Women were equally divided on whether they prefer the death penalty or life in prison; while two-thirds of non-white respondents prefer life in prison.

Further, 39 percent of respondents — including 28 percent of death penalty supporters — said they support abolishing the death penalty if the alternative punishment was life in prison.

“It is not surprising that Arkansans support the death penalty at a higher rate than the nation,” said Rodney Engen, associate professor of sociology who analyzed the death penalty poll data. “Arkansas is more conservative on many issues. What I find interesting is that support for the death penalty seems to be higher *across the board* in Arkansas; women, minorities, Democrats, and even liberals support the death penalty at levels above the national averages for these groups.”

Engen noted that in many respects, Arkansas looks very much like the rest of the nation; support for the death penalty is strongest among men, whites, Republicans, and conservatives. The fact that support for the death penalty drops substantially when respondents are given a choice between death and life in prison is also consistent with the national polls.

Methodology and Sample Data

The poll’s margin of error statewide is plus/minus 3.5 percent.

To assess the representativeness of the sample drawn for the poll, the Arkansas Poll team publishes a comparison of survey respondents’ key demographic characteristics to those of the state as a whole. This information and more historical data is available on the [Arkansas Poll website](#).

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RS11983_8534_Rodney_Engen-2.jpg – Rodney Engen, assistant professor of sociology.

RS11787_8349_Janine_Parry-Poli_sci-93.jpg - Janine Parry, professor of political science

RELATED WEB SITES (as many as needed):

[The Arkansas Poll] – <http://fulbright.uark.edu/departments/political-science/partners/arkansas-poll.php>

[Poll Track Record Data] – <http://fulbright.uark.edu/departments/political-science/partners/arkansas-poll.php>

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