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IWU Poll Results on Local, National Issues: Survey of Bloomington-Normal Area Residents

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IWU Poll Results on Local, National Issues:

Survey of Bloomington-Normal Area Residents

Yes to George W. Bush . . . No to U.S. tax cut . . . Yes to Hooters . . .

Yes to Federal Govt. Effectiveness . . . Yes to School Prayer . . .

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--George W. Bush is the choice for U.S. president among Bloomington-Normal residents, responding to a poll taken by Illinois Wesleyan University students enrolled in a political-science class. Among other key poll results: a federal tax cut is at the bottom of a national priority list, votes on legislation tend to reflect lawmakers' private interests over the views of their constituents, and just under two-thirds of respondents approve the opening of a Hooters restaurant here.

The canvass of 501 area residents on a range of national and local issues took place between Oct. 18-23.

Presidential Politics

Eyeing the 2000 presidential election, respondents were asked to pick their favorite candidates as if the election were today:

- Texas Gov. George W. Bush (R), 38 percent.
- Vice President Al Gore (D), 17 percent.
- Former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley (D), 11 percent.
- Former Cabinet Secretary Elizabeth Dole (R), 5 percent. (Subsequently, she ended her campaign).
- Arizona Sen. John McCain (R), 2 percent.
- Magazine publisher Steve Forbes (R), 2 percent.

Seventeen percent of poll respondents said they were undecided about which presidential candidate they favored.

Political commentator and former Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan, who switched from the GOP to the Reform Party two days after the survey was completed, attracted only three respondents or 1.2 percent of the sample.

An analysis of survey results concluded: "Buchanan's America-first message does not seem likely to resonate with residents of Bloomington-Normal, as when asked whether the U.S. should 'remain involved' in world affairs versus 'isolating itself more,' local residents preferred to see the US. remain involved by a 64 percent to 29 percent margin. Republicans', Democrats', and political independents' responses to this question were nearly identical in their tendencies."

Federal Tax Cut

Despite Washington rhetoric about Americans favoring a tax cut, Bloomington-Normal residents placed a tax cut at the bottom of their priority list. When offered a list of a half-dozen issues, and asked which issue respondents thought the federal government should address *first*, "giving Americans a tax cut" was the least frequently mentioned (9 percent), taking a backseat to education reform (30 percent), health-care reform (20 percent), Social Security (15 percent), fighting crime (12 percent), and national defense (10 percent).

Looking at the tax-cut issue from a different perspective, respondents favored by a better than 2-1 margin (66 percent to 29 percent) "putting the budget surplus toward projects" such as Social Security or the national debt, rather than trimming taxes.

An IWU analysis of poll results observed: "Regardless of how the question was framed for respondents, they strongly tended to reject the tax-cut option in favor of dedicating the [federal-budget] surplus to projects."

Attitudes Toward Congress

The canvass tapped into public cynicism targeted to Congress. Respondents indicated their belief that "when Congress votes on legislation lawmakers "tend to reflect their own private interests" over the "views of their constituents."

By a greater than 3-1 margin (68 percent to 22 percent), local residents saw members of Congress relying on their own interests as a guide to voting, rather than those of their constituents.

Federal Government Effectiveness

A related question probed respondents' attitudes about their satisfaction with the effectiveness of the federal government. Just over half (52 percent) said they were either "very" or "somewhat satisfied" with the federal government's performance. Another 46 percent indicated they were "somewhat" or "very dissatisfied" with Washington.

"The difference between those who report satisfaction versus dissatisfaction," according to a survey analysis, "is statistically insignificant for our survey."

Hooters

Turning to local issues, a whopping 96 percent of respondents said they had heard about the debate over locating a Hooters restaurant here. Hooters trademark is scantily clad waitresses.

Sixty-three percent of poll respondents approved of Hooters coming to town. However, gender differences played a major role in poll results. Only 48 percent of women favored Hooters joining the Bloomington business community, while 83 percent of men approved the restaurant's opening.

Additionally, women were three times as likely as men (19 percent compared to 6 percent) to express no opinion on this question. Democrats and political independents were significantly more approving of Hooters than were self-identified Republicans.

Bars and Clubs

On a related question, when asked if they favor or oppose establishment of additional bars and clubs in downtown Bloomington, local residents were slightly more approving than disapproving 48 percent to 37 percent, respectively.

Guns and Violence

The poll also surveyed attitudes towards guns and violence.

Seventy-two percent blamed a decline of morals for violence, compared to only 7 percent who placed the blame on the availability of guns. Sixteen percent blamed declining morals and guns equally.

"But if area residents cannot be said to blame primarily guns for violence in the U.S.," a poll analysis concluded, "they also seem to support further control over the sale of handguns."

Sixty-one percent voiced support for more controls on gun sales, compared to only 37 percent who opposed controls.

Three Moral Issues

The survey also covered attitudes toward three moral issues that have received substantial news coverage in recent years: legalizing same-sex marriages, flag burning, and school prayer.

On legalizing same-sex marriages: 43 percent favored, 50 percent opposed such unions.

When asked to consider the "right to free political expression" versus "protection of our national symbols" as these concerns speak to the debate over a proposed constitutional amendment to outlaw flag burning, respondents favored outlawing flag burning over allowing it, 61 percent as compared to only 36 percent.

When respondents were asked to consider "organized school prayer" as something that might "create a more respectful environment in schools" versus the "separation of church and state," local residents expressed support for organized school prayer by a slightly less than 2-1 margin: 62 percent favored, 34 percent opposed.

"Interestingly," the survey analysis observed, "when the pro and con arguments were removed from the question, respondents split nearly evenly (43 percent support to 48 percent oppose) on this issue."

Survey Demographics

Demographically, survey respondents identified themselves this way: 38 percent Republicans, 27 percent Democrats, 22 percent independents, and 9 percent other. Political conservatives outnumbered liberals 26 percent to 13 percent, respectively. Thirty percent considered themselves moderates and another 30 percent preferred not to characterize themselves this way.

In the course of completing 501 interviews, contact was attempted with 1,064 households. The resulting 47.1 percent rate of completed interviews is considered good by contemporary standards.

Within households, respondents were randomly selected by way of asking for the adult with the most recent birthday.

The final gender split 55 percent women was within one percentage point of McLean County's gender distribution.

Four separate questionnaires were used, with approximately 125 respondents queried per ballot. Most questions appeared on two of the four ballots, meaning the response rates reported for most items can be expected to be within an 8-percentage point margin of sampling error.

For further information about the survey, contact: Greg Shaw, assistant professor of political science, at 309/556-3658.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. *Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine* ranks Illinois

Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's top 1,600 private colleges in providing a top-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton University and Dartmouth College.