

2013 Texas Lyceum Poll

Executive Summary of Issue Priorities, Attitudes on Transportation, Water, Infrastructure, Education, and Health Care

*It may be the economy for the country, but it's education here in Texas.
We want to do more on roads, water, education, and health care,
but are skeptical about big government projects.*

A September 6-20, 2013 survey of adult Texans reveals that while the economy still tops the list of problems facing the nation, education has crept to the head of the class when it comes to issues facing the state.

With respect to specific public policy attitudes, the poll shows substantial ambivalence amongst the state's citizens. Lone Star residents are split on the quality of roads, for example, but a majority favors spending on transportation infrastructure even if it means increased taxes. Similarly, a slight plurality favors the constitutional amendment allowing money from the Rainy Day Fund to be used for water infrastructure.

On the other side of the ledger, opposition to the Affordable Care Act remains substantial, and most Texans were happy to see the government-mandated TAKS/STAAR tests significantly reduced.

Summary of Findings

Most Important Problem

Among Texans, the economy remains the most important problem facing the country. Fully 35% of respondents indicated that either the economy (25%) or unemployment/jobs (10%) were the biggest problem facing the U.S. The second biggest problem according to Texans, Syria (10%), reflects the current situation in the Middle East and the broader discussion going on in the country about the potential for intervention. The top 5 issues were rounded out by healthcare (9%) and political corruption/leadership (6%).

At the state level, Education topped the list as the most important problem at 13%. Immigration was tied for second with the economy at 11%, followed by unemployment/jobs (9%), and finally health care (7%).

Whereas recent Texas Lyceum Polls have highlighted particular issues of the moment (e.g., 33% of respondents said education was the most important problem facing the state in 2011, while in 2010 immigration got the plurality of the responses, and in 2009, it was the economy), the 2013 poll reflects broad attention to these issues of years past, with particular attention to the plethora of issues in the

media: the economy, Syria, potential political corruption, and the rollout of the Affordable Care Act.

Transportation

While much legislative attention was paid to water this session, it is generally expected that the next major infrastructure issue to take hold of Texas politics will be transportation. Looking ahead, we asked a battery of questions meant to assess Texans' attitudes towards the current transportation system and their willingness to fix it. Overall, 42% of Texans said that they were satisfied with the quality of roads and highways in Texas compared with 40% who said that they were unsatisfied. While in general, Texans appear to be somewhat ambivalent about the quality of the roads in the state, dissatisfaction appears to logically decrease as one moves from an urban to a suburban, small town, and then rural environment – potentially reflecting the possibility that dissatisfaction is tied more to congestion than to access.

Given the likelihood that transportation funding will be a continuing issue in 2014 and especially 2015, we asked respondents how willing they would be to pay more in taxes or fees to fund a range of transportation ideas. We found that Texans would be most willing to pay more in taxes and fees to repair and improve already existing roads, highways, and bridges. The next most popular idea was to add lanes to existing highways and roads. Together, favorability toward these two ideas shows a marked willingness to improve the already existing road and highway system. The next two ideas, building light or commuter rail between cities and building new roadways, also achieved majority support at 53% and 52% respectively. The only idea that a majority of Texans would not be willing to pay more to fund was one that would add more bus routes or increase service – a reflection of Texas' automobile-centric culture.

Finally, we asked our respondents what they perceived to be the biggest threat to their safety while driving. Response options included: other drivers texting, drunk drivers, traffic congestion, younger drivers, older drivers, commercial trucks and trailers, the quality of the roads and highways, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The overwhelming plurality, 42%, chose other drivers texting as the biggest threat to their safety, followed by drunk drivers (27%), traffic congestion (10%), younger drivers and commercial trucks and trailers (both 8%), 2% each for the quality of roads and highways and older drivers, and 1% for bicyclists. No one perceived pedestrians as a threat to their safety.

Water

With the constitutional election approaching, we wanted to ask respondents whether they would vote in favor of or against the constitutional amendment that would take \$2 billion from the Rainy Day Fund and put it toward water infrastructure projects. Among registered voters, we found a slight plurality in favor of the measure, 44%, with 42% in opposition. But results like this should be taken with caution, as constitutional amendment elections are notorious for their low turnout (in November 2011, turnout among registered voters was below 6%). Keeping this in mind, when looking at potential ‘likely voters’ – still a large group in the survey context – 49% said that they would vote in favor of the measure, while opposition dropped to 36%.

Education

When it comes to education in Texas, the majority of respondents (53%) expressed the opinion that individual families are those most responsible for ensuring the education of their children. Eighteen percent expressed the opinion that the responsibility should fall to the state government, followed by 13% who felt it was the responsibility of local government, and 12% who believed that the responsibility was that of the national government.

Given that in 2013 the Texas Legislature restored some of the cuts made to public education in 2011, we asked respondents where they felt that money should go. A focus on teachers was clearly evident, as 55% of respondents said that the restored funds should either go toward increased teacher pay (31%) or toward the hiring of additional teachers (24%). Similar to last year’s poll, district administrators fared the worst, with less than one-half of 1% expressing support for increasing their pay.

Another area that the Legislature tackled this session included reducing the number of tests required to graduate from the Texas public school system from 15 to 5. We asked respondents how they felt about this change giving them a range of options. Overall, 14% agreed with the notion that “the legislature should have left it alone; standards matter and 15 tests was fine”; 17% felt that “The legislature did the right thing; standards are fine but 15 was too many”; 25% felt that “The legislature should have eliminated these tests because they force the schools to ‘teach to the test’”; and 31% thought that “The legislature should have eliminated these tests and left evaluation to local jurisdictions.”

Affordable Care Act

With the health insurance exchanges established under the Affordable Care Act opening up this February, we wanted to assess Texans’ attitudes toward the law in the run up to implementation. Overall, 36% of Texans have a favorable opinion of

the law compared with 41% with an unfavorable opinion. Democrats are overwhelmingly favorable to the law at 64%, while 67% of Republicans have an unfavorable opinion of the law.

Another, much publicized, aspect of the Affordable Care Act is its provision to expand Medicaid in the states. Governor Rick Perry is one of the few remaining holdouts of the Medicaid expansion. When asked whether Texas should take the opportunity to expand Medicaid or keep it as it currently is, 49% of Texans expressed a preference to keep Medicaid in its current form while 41% supported expanding it. Republicans are most opposed, only 20% of whom think that Medicaid should be expanded. Democrats are most supportive of Medicaid expansion (62%).

Finally, among those who indicated on a previous question that they did not currently have health insurance, we asked them how likely they would be to purchase insurance in the insurance exchanges currently being established. Fifty-seven percent said that they would be very or somewhat likely to purchase insurance through the exchanges while 36% said that they would be not very or not at all likely to do the same.

Methodology

From September 6-20, 2013, The Texas Lyceum conducted a statewide telephone survey of adult citizens. The survey utilized a stratified probability sample design, with respondents being randomly selected at the level of the household. The survey also employed a randomized cell phone supplement, with approximately 39% of completed interviews being conducted among cell phone only or cell phone dominant households. A Spanish-language instrument was developed and bilingual interviewers offered respondents a chance to participate in English or Spanish. On average, respondents completed the interview in 19 minutes. Approximately 6,100 records were drawn to yield 1,000 completed interviews. The final data set is weighted by race/ethnicity, age and gender to achieve representativeness as defined by the Texas specifications from the 2010 Current Population Study. The overall margin of error for the poll is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

The general election ballot questions were asked of the survey's 798 registered voters (margin of error is +/- 3.47 percentage points). The Republican primary ballot questions were asked of the 279 registered voters who said that they intended to vote in next March's GOP primary election (margin of error is 5.87 percentage points).

The Texas Lyceum

The Texas Lyceum has committed to annual probability samples of the state of Texas to bolster its understanding of public opinion on crucial policy issues. The professional rationale for the Texas Lyceum Poll is straightforward: a non-partisan, high quality, scientific survey designed to provide (1) specific data points on issues of interest, and (2) a time series of key demographics, attitudes, and opinions. Towards this end, the trademark of the Texas Lyceum Poll is transparency. Top-line and detailed cross-tabular results of each poll will be made available on the Texas Lyceum website at **www.texaslyceum.org**.

The Texas Lyceum, now 33 years strong, is a non-profit, non-partisan statewide leadership organization focused on identifying the next generation of Texas leaders. The Texas Lyceum consists of 96 men and women from throughout the state. Directors begin their service while under the age of 46 and have demonstrated leadership in their community and profession, together with a deep commitment to Texas.

The Texas Lyceum acts as a catalyst to bring together diverse opinions and expertise to focus on national and state issues, and seeks to emphasize constructive private sector, public sector, and individual responses to the issues.

To accomplish these purposes, the Lyceum conducts periodic public forums, publishes the *Lyceum Journal*, commissions The Texas Lyceum Poll, and convenes programs for the Directors to explore and discuss key economic and social issues of the state and nation.