

***2004 Jefferson County
Quality of Life, and
Presidential and Congressional Election Survey***

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The Survey

The Lamar University Center for Public Policy Studies conducted a phone survey of registered voters in Jefferson County from October 4 through October 7, 2004. The survey was a random survey of 371 registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 5.1 percentage points.

The survey dealt with three broad areas: the general level of satisfaction with life in Jefferson County; the level of satisfaction on specific issues of concern in our region; the upcoming presidential and congressional elections.

Results of this survey reflect the attitudes and opinions of registered voters, not the actual level of government services.

On any given issue, the percentages reported in the following sections may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Political and Demographic Characteristics of Voters

Before reporting the responses of voters to the questions on quality of life, regional issues and the upcoming elections, it is important to note the political and demographic characteristics of the voters in the sample.

Voters were asked their party identification as well as their political ideology.

29% of voters identify themselves as Republican, 36% as Democrat, 28% as Independent, and 7% as Other.

49% of voters say they are Conservative, 13% Liberal, 33% Moderate, and 6% Other.

Voters were also asked their education level, their racial/ethnic background, their gender and age.

8% of voters report completing through 11th grade, 26% report a high school degree, 32% report having some college, and 33% report a college degree.

20% of voters say they are African American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian American, 71% Anglo, and 4% Other.

60% are female, 40% are male. The average age is 53.

Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Jefferson County

Overall, voters think the quality of life in Jefferson County is good and is likely to get even better. At present, most voters are satisfied with the quality of life in Jefferson County. Though many say that the quality of life stayed the same during the past five years, most expect life in Jefferson County to improve over the next five years.

83% of voters say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in Jefferson County.

37% of voters say that during the past five years Jefferson County became a better place to live, 44% say there had been no change, and 19% say Jefferson County became a worse place to live.

54% of voters expect Jefferson County to be a better place to live over the next five years, 31% expect no change, and 15% expect Jefferson County to become a worse place to live.

Issues Facing Citizens in Our Region

Voters were asked how satisfied they were with our region's economy, the quality of education, healthcare costs and services, housing, and air quality.

Overwhelmingly, voters are satisfied with the availability of affordable housing and with the quality of education in our region. Healthcare is a concern, however. Relatively few voters are satisfied with healthcare costs and services.

73% of voters say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of affordable housing in the region.

Close behind, at 71%, is the quality of education in the region.

Though a majority, comparatively fewer voters are satisfied with the region's economy. 57% of voters say they are satisfied or very satisfied with our region's economy.

Voters are evenly split in their level of satisfaction with air equality. 50% of voters say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of our region's air.

Without question, voters are least satisfied with healthcare costs and services. Only 39% of voters say they are satisfied or very satisfied with healthcare costs and services.

Voters were also asked about a terrorist attack in our region, and about substance abuse.

Though the level of concern with a terrorist attack in our region is not extreme, there is concern.

27% of voters say they are very concerned about a terrorist attack in our region, 42% say they are somewhat concerned, and 31% say they are not concerned.

Voters were asked two questions about substance abuse. One question asked about drug abuse in our region; the other asked about drug availability in the voter's particular neighborhood.

Though most voters consider drug abuse to be a significant regional concern, most do not consider it to be such a big concern in their particular neighborhood.

63% of voters say that drug abuse is a big problem in our region; 32% said it is somewhat of a problem, and 5% say drug abuse is not a problem in our region.

When asked to evaluate their specific neighborhood, however, a different picture emerges.

24% of voters say that drugs are very available to youths in their neighborhood; 33% say drugs are somewhat available, and 43% say that drugs are not available to youths in their neighborhood.

Presidential and Congressional Elections

Voters were asked whether George Bush or John Kerry could best deal with each of several issues. These issues were the economy, terrorism and defense, and healthcare.

By a substantial margin, voters say that George Bush can best handle the economy and can best handle terrorism. Terrorism is Bush's strongest issue, and is Kerry's weakest. On the issue of health care, voters are split between George Bush and John Kerry. Many voters, however, are just not sure which of these two presidential candidates can best deal with these issues.

48% of voters say that Bush can best handle the economy; 33% Kerry, and 19% not sure.

59% of voters say that Bush can best handle terrorism and defense; 26% Kerry, and 15% not sure.

41% of voters say that Bush can best deal with health care; 37% Kerry, and 22% not sure. Though Bush is a few percentage points ahead of Kerry on this issue, there may be little difference in fact because the percentage point difference between the candidates falls within the statistical margin of error.

Voters were also asked whether they thought the country was heading in the right direction or was heading in the wrong direction.

61% of voters say that the country is heading in the right direction, 39% say the country is heading in the wrong direction.

Voters were asked what presidential candidate they would vote for if the election were held tomorrow.

George Bush is the clear choice among Jefferson County voters. However, there are a substantial number of undecided voters.

50% of voters say they would vote for Bush; 33% for Kerry, 1% for someone else, and 16% were undecided.

There are differences in each of these major party presidential candidate's basis of electoral support.

Bush draws support from Republicans (93% of Republicans say they would vote for Bush), from conservatives (71% of conservatives say they would vote for Bush); from those with some college or a college degree (54%), from Anglos (58%); from those who say that he can best handle the economy (93%), best handle terrorism (83%), best deal with health care (98%); from those who say that the country is heading in the right direction (74%).

Kerry draws support from Democrats (71% of Democrats say they would vote for Kerry), from liberals (60% of liberals say they would vote for Kerry); from those with less than a high school degree (54%), from African Americans (67%); from those who say he can best handle the economy (86%), best handle terrorism (87%), best deal with health care (78%); from those who say that the country is heading in the wrong direction (66%).

Republican party identification, thinking that Bush can best handle the economy, and that Bush can best deal with the issue of health care are closely aligned with support for Bush. No single item is as closely aligned with support for Kerry. Among all items, thinking that Kerry can best handle the economy, and that Kerry can best deal with terrorism are most closely aligned with support for Kerry.

A comparison of these candidates' electoral bases of support shows that the political characteristics of voters – party identification and political ideology – are somewhat stronger predictors of support for Bush than they are for Kerry. Further, for both Bush and Kerry, party is a better predictor of voter support than is political ideology.

Voters were also asked what candidate they would vote for – Ted Poe or Nick Lampson – in the district 2 congressional election.

Lampson is the clear choice among Jefferson County voters. As in the presidential election, however, a substantial number of voters are undecided.

60% of voters say they would vote for Lampson; 17% for Poe, 1% for someone else, and 22% were undecided.

Undecided voters are a large percentage in both of these election contests. It is an interesting question to ask about these undecided voters. What do they look like in terms of their party identification and political ideology?

Regarding the presidential election – Republican identifiers have made up their mind (for Bush), as have many ideological liberals (for Kerry). Undecided voters in the presidential contest exhibit the following political characteristics:

11% of undecided voters are Republican, 41% are Democrat, 41% are Independent, and 7% report no or some other party identification.

41% of undecided voters are Conservative, 41% are Moderate, 12% are Liberal, and 6% report no or some other political ideology

Regarding the district 2 congressional election – more Democrats than Republicans have made up their mind, as have more Moderates and Liberals than Conservatives.

Undecided voters in the district 2 congressional election exhibits the following political characteristics:

40% of undecided voters are Republican, 22% are Democrat, 30% are Independent, and 7% report no or some other party identification.

59% of undecided voters are Conservative, 23% are Moderate, 9% are Liberal, and 9% report no or some other political ideology.

Summary

The majority of voters are satisfied with the quality of life in Jefferson County, and expect Jefferson County to become an even better place to live over the next 5 years.

Concerning our region – the majority of voters are satisfied with the availability of affordable housing, the quality of education, and the economy. Voters are somewhat less satisfied with air quality, and are dissatisfied with healthcare costs and services.

Concerning the presidential election – Bush is the frontrunner among Jefferson County voters. A substantial number of voters, however, are undecided.

Concerning the district 2 congressional election – Lampson is the frontrunner among Jefferson County voters. As in the presidential election, a substantial number of voters are undecided.

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