



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College

The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

For Immediate Release:

April 21, 2011

Rockefeller Center Associate Director & Senior Fellow Ronald G. Shaiko, Survey Director

Contact:

Professor Ronald G. Shaiko, (603) 646-9146 or Ronald.G.Shaiko@Dartmouth.edu

Undergraduate Data Analyst: Brian Freeman

**Rockefeller Center Completes 4th Annual New Hampshire State of the State Poll on
Politics, Economic Issues, and Social Policies.**

Voters pessimistic about economic future.

Trump trounced, Romney and Powell victorious in hypothetical matchups against Obama.

NH voters prioritize balancing the state budget over building the economy.

Less than one-quarter of voters approve of the job performance of the NH Legislature.

HANOVER, NH—The Rockefeller Center’s fourth annual State of the State Poll surveyed a sample of New Hampshire registered voters (N=426) to get their opinions on policy issues, elected officials, and the state of the economy in New Hampshire and in the United States. Sample demographics and polling methodology are summarized at the end of this report.

The poll indicates that voters have perceived a decline in the national economy since last year. The proportion of respondents rating the economy “excellent”, “good”, or “fair” slipped from 47.2 percent last year to 38.6 percent this year. The proportion of respondents expressing economic optimism has also plummeted. Nearly half of respondents would have legislators cut spending before they raise taxes, and balancing the state budget topped the list of state policy priorities for the first time. President Obama’s job approval rating slipped from 45.1 percent to 36.2 percent over the same period.

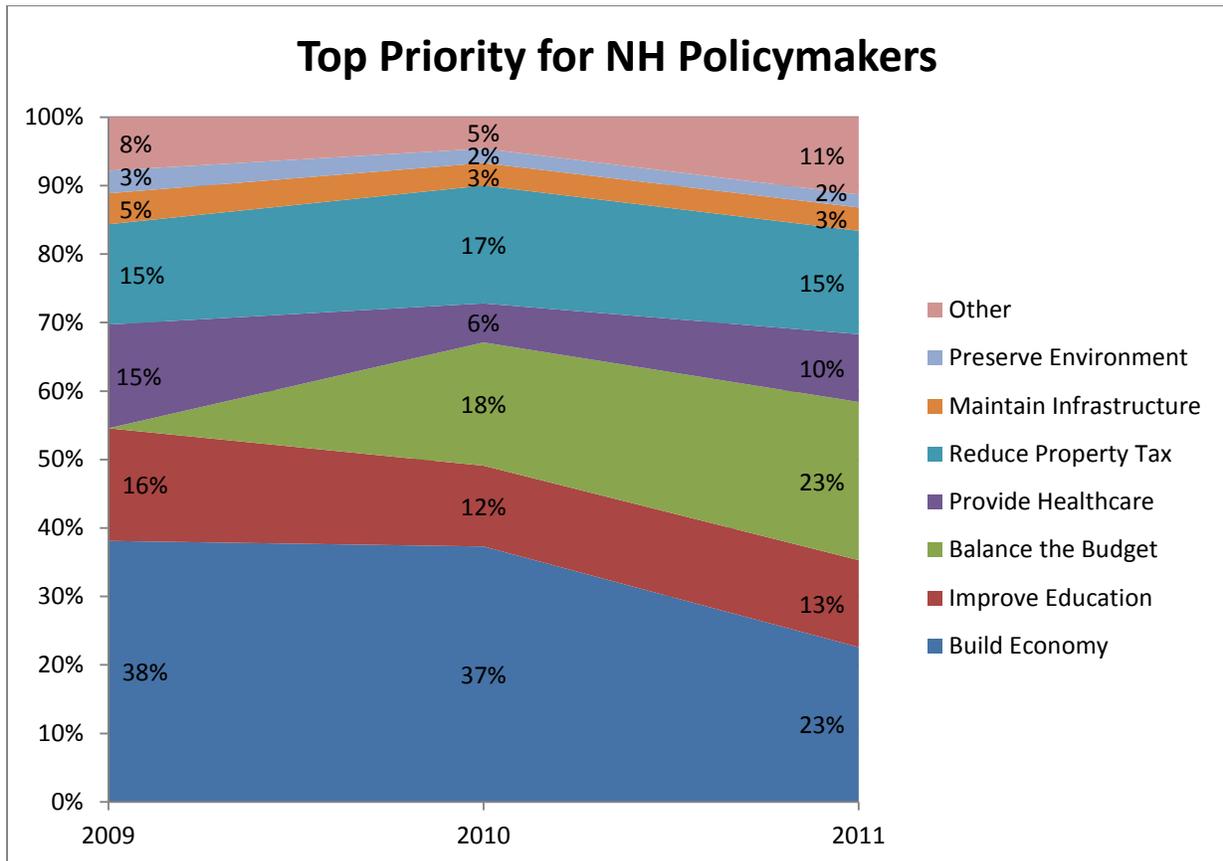
POLICY ISSUES

Registered voters answered survey questions about policy issues facing New Hampshire and the nation. This year, balancing the state budget trumped building the state economy as the top policy priority of New Hampshire voters. To resolve budget deficits at the state and national levels, voters prefer to cut programs rather than raise taxes. On the issues of same-sex marriage and gambling in New Hampshire, respondents' opinions were closely divided.

State policy priorities

Respondents were given a list of policy issues and asked to select the one they thought should be the top priority for New Hampshire policymakers. For the first time, balancing the state budget (23.1 percent) narrowly surpassed building the state economy (22.6 percent) as the top policy priority.

Below is a graph of state policy priorities from the 2011, 2010, and 2009 polls:¹



In assessing the relative importance of different levels of government in ensuring New Hampshire's future, 62.3 percent of respondents identify "the state government in Concord" as

¹ Most of the respondents selecting "other" could not decide between two or more of the options offered. "Balancing the budget" was added as an option in the 2010 poll.

being the most important, nearly unchanged from last year (62.0 percent). Only 15.3 percent of respondents choose local government as most important, a significant decrease from 2010 (22.1 percent).

Budgetary Policy

New Hampshire voters remained concerned about the state budget, but are significantly less dire in their assessment of it as compared to a year ago. In 2010, 42.9 percent of respondents rated New Hampshire's budget problems as "very serious;" this year, only 30.5 percent of respondents reached that assessment. However, the proportion of respondents rating the problem as "somewhat serious" increased from 44.1 percent in 2010 to 51.0 percent this year. In general, respondents indicate that they would rather have reduced services than higher taxes. When asked about measures to help resolve local budget problems, close to a majority of respondents favor "maintaining taxes, decreasing services" (49.2 percent) over "increasing taxes, maintaining services" (31.0 percent). Similarly, 48.8 percent of respondents say that programs should be cut to resolve the national budget deficit. Only 17.5 percent of respondents say that taxes should be raised to reduce the national deficit.

State Judiciary

While 62.5 of respondents report that they are "somewhat" or "completely" aware of the impact of budget cuts at state courts, only 24.3 percent of respondents believe that the state judiciary should be spared from state budget cuts. A clear majority of respondents (61.3 percent) believe that the judicial system should bear its fair share of budget cuts.

Social Issues

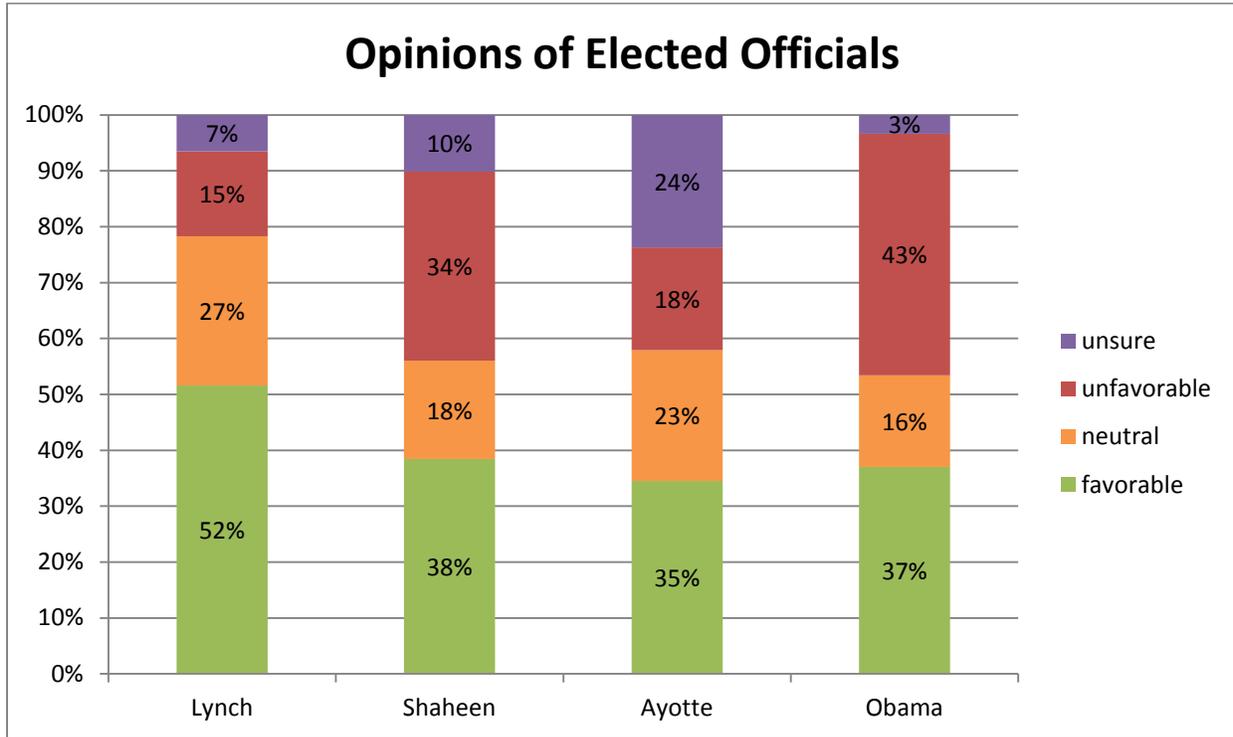
New Hampshire voters are nearly evenly split on same-sex marriage and gambling. 42.2 percent of respondents oppose same-sex marriage, while 41.5 percent of respondents support it and 15 percent are unsure. Similarly, 41.5 percent of respondents support legalizing slot machines and casinos in New Hampshire, while 41.3 percent oppose and 16.9 percent are unsure.

POLITICIANS

Respondents were asked for their assessments of elected officials in New Hampshire and at the national level. Governor Lynch's favorable rating rebounded from 42.5 percent last year to 51.6 percent this year. Senators Shaheen and Ayotte and President Obama all have favorable ratings below 40 percent, though Senator Ayotte appears to suffer from lack of exposure rather than high unfavorable ratings.

New Hampshire politicians

Respondents were polled about their opinions of statewide elected officials in New Hampshire, including Governor John Lynch, Senator Jeanne Shaheen, and Senator Kelly Ayotte. They were also asked their opinion of President Obama. The following chart summarizes the results.



Though both senators have similar favorable ratings, Senator Shaheen's unfavorable rating (34 percent) is nearly twice that of Senator Ayotte (18 percent) because half of the respondents were neutral or had no opinion of Senator Ayotte. President Obama's unfavorable rating (43 percent) exceeds his favorable rating (37 percent).

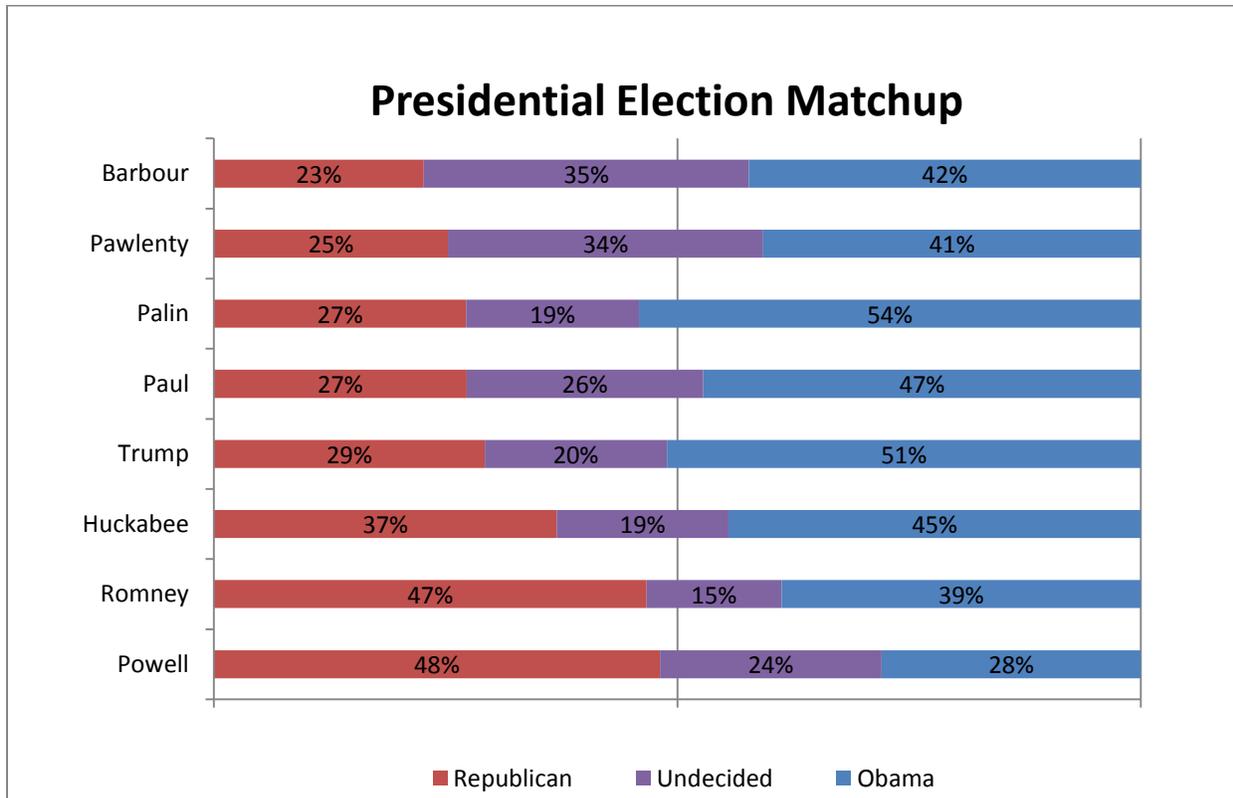
Nearly three-fifths of respondents (59.6 percent) approve of Governor Lynch's job performance, with the remainder evenly split between disapprove and unsure. Less than a quarter of respondents (24.0 percent) approve of the New Hampshire legislature's job performance, with the remainder evenly split between disapprove and unsure. Compared to last year, more voters disapprove of the legislature's performance (37.8 percent versus 31.2 percent) and fewer are unsure (38.3 percent versus 45.8 percent). Nearly half of respondents (46.8 percent) disapprove of President Obama's job performance. President Obama's approval rating has dropped from 45.1 percent last year to 36.4 percent this year.

2012 U.S. Presidential Race

To gauge support for President Obama against possible Republican presidential candidates, survey respondents were asked the following question:

“Recently, President Barack Obama has formally announced his intent to run for reelection for president. And, the New Hampshire primary election for the presidency of the United States is less than a year away. I am going to read you a list of potential Republican candidates for president who may run against President Obama. If the election for president were held today, which candidate would you choose?”

The following table summarizes the results:²



Of the Republican candidates expected to seek the presidential nomination, only Mitt Romney received a plurality of support. Barack Obama received a majority of the vote in matchups against Sarah Palin and Donald Trump. The Republican who performed best against Obama was Colin Powell. Powell was added to the survey in an effort to test the perceived absence of leadership qualities among the Republican candidates and in President Obama. Despite his advanced age and no mention of any presidential aspirations at this time, New Hampshire registered voters in the sample are clearly enamored with the prospect of a Powell candidacy.

² For each matchup, 2-3% of respondents said that they would not vote for either candidate. Those respondents have been excluded from the calculation of overall vote percentage.

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

In the third year after the financial crisis, New Hampshire citizens report being slightly better off financially compared to 2009 and 2010, but are much less optimistic about their future financial situations. While assessments of the state economy have stabilized, assessments of the national economy have soured significantly.

State of the economy: New Hampshire

Respondents' impressions of New Hampshire's economic situation have not changed significantly since last year. When assessing the current state of the New Hampshire economy, 47.7 percent of respondents think the economy is "fair," 29.3 percent think the economy is "poor," and 21.1 percent think the economy is "good" or "excellent."

State of the economy: United States

Respondents' assessments of the national economy have worsened significantly since last year. 60.4 percent of respondents rate the national economy as "poor," compared to 49.1 percent in 2010. 35.1 percent rate the national economy as "fair," compared to 40.5 percent last year. Only 3.5 percent of respondents rate the national economy as "good" or "excellent," compared to 6.7 percent last year.

Respondents' personal finances

Compared to results from 2009 and 2010, respondents' assessments of their personal financial situations have improved slightly, but they have grown more pessimistic about the future. Over half of respondents (55.2 percent) believe that their personal economic situation is "about the same" as last year, which is up from 49.6 percent last year and 48.5 percent for the year before. The proportion of respondents who believe they are "worse off" has declined from 44.0 percent in 2009 to 38.0 percent in 2010 to 34.0 percent in 2011. However, less than one quarter of respondents (22.1 percent) this year predict that their personal financial situation in one year will be "better," a sharp drop from the 31.7 percent of respondents who expressed optimism last year and 32.5 percent who did so in 2009.

The number of respondents who report that they or a family member has been negatively affected by the mortgage crisis increased slightly from the 2010 low of 16.4 percent to 20.0 percent, roughly equivalent to the figure from 2009 (19.4 percent). Responses from voters reveal relative stability in regards to concerns about credit card debt, with approximately 19.6 percent of this year's respondents indicating that credit card debt is a "top personal financial concern," compared to last year's poll (16.3 percent).

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2011 New Hampshire State of the State Poll respondents are representative of the registered voter population of the state. Respondents were evenly split among males (49.6 percent) and females (50.4 percent). On the partisan identification measure, the respondents closely mirror the voting population in New Hampshire with the largest plurality of respondents identifying as "undeclared" or independent (43.2 percent), with 27.7 percent identifying as Democrats and 29.1 percent identifying as Republicans. Geographically, respondents from the 2nd Congressional District are a bit over-represented in the sample (55.8 percent), with the remaining 44.2 percent drawn from the 1st Congressional District. More than three-quarters of the respondents are married (75.7 percent), while 8.8 percent are divorced, 8.6 percent are widowed, and 6.9 percent are single. The sample respondents are more highly educated than the New Hampshire general population with more than 60 percent of the respondents have college degrees (60.2 percent), including 5.2 percent with doctoral degrees (e.g., M.D., J.D., Ph.D.). The sample respondents are also older than the general population as more than two-thirds of respondents are 50 or older. We have no comparable age or education level data for registered voters in the state, however. Respondents reported their 2010 household income as follows: 18.0 percent earned less than \$40,000, 43.3 percent earned between \$40,000 and \$100,000, and 24.1 percent earned more than \$100,000. Additionally, respondents reported their occupational status. Finally, just over a one-third of the respondents are retired (37.1 percent).

POLL METHODS

During the week of April 11-14, 2011, students from The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College conducted a telephone survey of registered voters in New Hampshire. Drawn from a statewide data base of New Hampshire registered voters, the sample survey respondents were asked a wide range of questions relating to the current political, economic, and social state of affairs in New Hampshire and the country as a whole. In addition, respondents were asked to select candidates for President in trial heats of the 2012 election. The 43-question survey took between eight and ten minutes to complete. Calls were made between the hours of 6:30 pm and 9:30 pm on Monday through Thursday evenings. Additional call-backs were made during daytime hours on Thursday, April 14 when specified by poll participants. Over the course of the week, callers made three attempts to contact each of the registered voters drawn in the sample. A total of 426 survey interviews were completed during the four-day calling period, yielding an error rate of +/-4.8 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval.