The Elway Poll

An independent nonpartisan analysis of public opinion trends in Washington and the Northwest

7 APRIL 17

Mapping Washington's Attitudinal Terrain Shows Parties Polarizing More Than Counties

Washington's political class has been pondering the results of the vote here since November. Not that the races were close. Hillary Clinton, Patty Murray and Jay Inslee all won handily. Donald Trump's 37% was the lowest percentage of the presidential vote in 20 years while carrying 27 of Washington's 39 counties. This is not unusual. Republicans typically win more counties, while Democrats win more votes. What caught people's attention was that Trump carried several counties in Western Washington that had not voted for a Republican in decades. Bill Bryant carried more counties than Trump.

This vote distribution has led to comparisons of Washington's economically challenged counties to the nation's "rust belt" that flipped to Trump. What distinguishes Trump majority counties from Clinton majority counties? There are the general characteristics related to geography (Eastern WA for Trump, Puget Sound for Clinton) and the economy (thriving counties for Clinton, hurting counties for Trump). But the election seems to have exposed a fissure in state politics that goes beyond historical party identification and beyond the traditional model of the "Cascade Curtain" separating Eastern and Western Washington.

How do voters' attitudes in Trump counties differ from attitudes in Clinton counties? This edition of *The Elway Poll* looks at several prominent campaign issues from the point of view of voters living in these counties. What are the dynamics in those counties? **It is important to keep in mind that the focus here is on the counties, not the voters who supported Trump and Clinton.** For example, "Trump county voters" refers to all the voters in a county that Trump carried, not just those who voted for Trump.

The level of political debate is the same in both Clinton and Trump counties:

45% of all voters in Clinton counties and
44% of all voters in Trump counties have been in a political argument since the election.

What are they arguing about? What are the contours of the voter debate in the red and blue counties of Washington state? Where do voters in Clinton and Trump counties disagree? Where do the differ, but not necessarily disagree? And where do they find agreement?

To address this question, this survey asked 12 fundamental attitude questions to a representative sample of 500 Washington voters. The answers from Trump counties are compared to those from Clinton counties. The results are counter intuitive. Remarkably, majorities of voters in Trump and Clinton counties were on the same side of the issue far more often than they were on opposite sides. Opinions often differed in degree, but not in direction.

Most of these items have been asked in the past, allowing for an additional comparison to answers from 5 or 10 years ago. *(The items and the comparisons over time appear on p. 6).*

First, voter opinion of Trump himself is not quite as polarized as the red/blue maps suggest, largely because opposition to Trump is stronger than support for him:

- Voters in Clinton counties said Trump is "bringing the wrong kind of changes to the country" by a wide margin (50% wrong changes; 30% right changes); while
- Voters in Trump counties said he was making the "right kind od changes," but only by a narrow margin (43% right changes; 37% wrong changes).
- Clinton county voters disapproved of his leadership style by a 60-35% margin; while
- Trump county voters approved of his style by margin of only 51-45%.

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DISAGREEMENTS

For only three of the 12 issues were majorities or near majorities of voters in Trump and Clinton counties on opposite sides.

- Environmental regulations:
  49% of Trump county voters said that strict environmental regulations harm the economy;
  62% of Clinton county voters said they are worth the cost.
- Government Waste:
  56% of Trump county voters said that government is almost always wasteful and inefficient;
  49% of Clinton county voters said that government is more effective than it gets credit for.
- Government guarantee of personal security:
- 51% of Clinton county voters said government should guarantee everyone enough to eat and a place to sleep;
  54% of Trump county voters did not think it should.

AREAS OF DIFFERENCES, BUT NOT STRONG DISAGREEMENT

There were four issues where Clinton and Trump county voters were on the same side of the question, but with different levels of intensity.

- Immigrants:
  71% of Clinton county voters said that immigrants strengthen rather than harm the US;
  57% of Trump county voters agreed.
- Government intrusion:
  67% of Trump county voters said government controls too much or our daily lives;
  57% of Clinton county voters agreed.
- Inequality:
  78% of all voters in Clinton counties agreed that "too much wealth in this country is controlled by the few people at the top."
  67% of all voters in Trump counties agreed.
- Government benefits:
  54% of Trump county voters said it is too easy for people to get government benefits without having to do anything to earn them;
  46% of Clinton county voters agreed, but another 46% said that the reason most people get government benefits in the first place is because they are unable to work or can't find work.

AREAS OF AGREEMENT

Majorities of voters in both Clinton and Trump counties were on the same side of five issues, although the intensity of the opinions varied:

- Political correctness:
  73% in Trump counties said that is often used to keep people from speaking their minds;
  70% in Clinton counties agreed.
- Elected officials do not care about people like them:
  71% of Trump county voters said they do not, and
  65% of Clinton county voters agreed.
- Security through strength and active foreign policy:
  57% of Clinton county voters said that US security is best served via a "strong and active role in international affairs";
  52% of Trump county voters agreed.

- International trade: Voters in both types of counties are divided.

  In Clinton counties:
  44% of voters favored promotion of free trade, but
  41% favored protecting US industries.

  In Trump counties:
  46% of voters favored protecting US Industries and
  40% favored promotion of free trade.

- Taxes:

  65% of all voters in Trump counties and 64% in Clinton counties said that "Taxes are mostly positive because they are how we pay for important things that make our quality of life good - such as health care, education, and roads";

  28% in both Clinton and Trump counties said "Taxes are mostly negative because they take money out of people's pockets and hold back economic growth and the creation of wealth ."

The items included in this analysis represent an array of issues debated in the recent election. The characterization of them tried to avoid the campaign language typically used. The neutral language may have subdued some of the response, masking differences that would show up if both sides of the issue were presented in campaign-style language. Further, and importantly, this list avoided specific policy proposals to these issues, which is where much of the real political debate takes place. Still, it is remarkable how little disagreement there was among most voters in Clinton counties and Trump counties about what the issues are.

This indicates that the "red county / blue county" model, so convenient as shorthand, is perhaps too convenient. There are differences between Clinton and Trump counties, but this analysis indicates that many of the same issue dynamics that separate the counties are at work *within* those counties. This is not a shocking revelation, since obviously there are Clinton voters in red counties and Trump voters in blue counties. But is it does serve as a reminder that politics at the voter level is more complex than we sometimes think.

Partisans are Poles Apart

The real polarization is apparent between the parties. Partisans in this survey could not even agree on what the issues are. As the table on page 5 indicates, majorities of Democrats and Republicans were on opposite sides for nine of these same 12 issues. The three exceptions, where most Democrats and Republicans agreed (although the size of the majorities differed), were:

- Inequality:

  93% of Democrats said that too much wealth in this country is controlled a few people at the top;
  53% of Republican agreed.

- Political correctness:

  85% of Republicans said that political correctness is often used to keep people from speaking their mind;
  59% of Democrats agreed.

- Representation:

  70% of Republicans said that most elected officials don't care what people like them think;
  57% of Democrats agreed.

These three issues seem like context or process issues. They focus on the context in which policy debates take place. They go to something fundamental about the society and the political process. And partisans of both red and blue Washington basically agree on them.

Sample Profile

503 registered voters, selected at random from registered voter lists in Washington state, were interviewed Mar 30—Apr 2, 2017 by live, professional interviewers. 32% of the interviews were conducted on cell phones. The margin of sampling error is ±4.5% at the 95% level of confidence. This means, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the results would be within ±4.5% of the results reported here at least 95 times.

REGION	
Seattle	7%
King County	23%
Pierce/Kitsap	17%
No. Puget Sound	16%
Far West	17%
Eastern WA	20%
GENDER	
Male	48%
Female	52%
VOTE HISTORY	
0-1 Votes cast in previous 4 elections	34%
2-3 Votes cast in previous 4 elections	39%
4 Votes cast in previous 4 elections	27%
PARTY ID	
Democrat	32%
Republican	24%
Independent	44%
AGE	
18-35	10%
36-50	20%
51-64	38%
65+	30%
EDUCATION	
High School	15%
Some College / Voc-Tech	24%
College Degree	36%
Graduate Degree	23%
INCOME	
$50,000 or less	25%
$50 to 74,000	14%
$75 to 99,000	15%
$100,000+	26%
No Answer	21%

The Elway Poll

The Elway Poll is an independent, non-partisan analysis of public opinion in Washington and the Northwest, published since 1992.

PROPRIETARY QUESTIONS: Each quarter, space is reserved in the questionnaire for organizations to insert their own, proprietary questions. Sponsors are thus able to ask their own questions for a fraction of the cost of a full survey. Results, with demographic crosstabulations, are provided within three days after the interviews are completed.

The Elway Poll

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Changes Over Time

Nine of the 12 items had been asked in previous *Elway Polls,* allowing for a comparison of changes in voter thinking over time.

Two items had majorities that had grown from previous surveys:

- Immigrants strengthen, rather than burden the US (67%, up from 57% in 2005);
- The US should maintain a strong and active role in international affairs (55%, from 47% in 2006).

Six other items maintained a steady majority, unchanged or unasked in previous years:

- Too much wealth in this country is controlled by the few people at the top (74%).
- Political correctness often gets used to keep people from speaking their minds (70%);
- Elected official do not care what people like me think (66%);
- Taxes are mostly positive (65%);
- Government controls too much of our daily lives (59%);
- Strict environmental regulations are worth the cost (57%);

Opinion was divided on the remaining four items, as it has been in the past:

- Trade:
  43% said the federal government should promote free and open trade;
  42% said the government should protect US industries.
- Government benefits:
  48% said they were too easy to get without earning them:
  44% said the reason people get benefits is because they are unable to work.
- Government guarantees:
  48% said the government should guarantee everyone food and shelter;
  48% said it should not.
- Government waste:
  48% said the government is almost always wasteful and inefficient;
  46% said government is more effective than it gets credit for.

The full set of comparisons is presented in the on page 6.

Attitude Items by Party Identification.

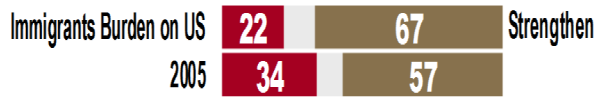
This table displays the 12 core items used in this survey. Respondents were either read a pair of statements and asked which statement came closest to their opinion, or were read a single statement and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with that statement.

	DEMs	REPs	INDs
• Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents.	90	42	64
• Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and healthcare.	6	41	23
• Taxes are mostly positive because they are how we pay for important things that make our quality of life good - such as health care, education, and roads.	89	42	59
• Taxes are mostly negative because they take money out of people's pockets and hold back economic growth and the creation of wealth.	9	41	34
• Strict environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy	11	71	36
• Strict environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost	86	21	56
Best for US economy:			
• The federal government should promote and protect US industry	33	54	42
• The federal government should promote free and open trade	50	32	44
• It is too easy for people to get government benefits without having to do anything to earn them.	26	77	47
• The reason most people get government benefits is because they are unable to work or can't find work.	65	15	43
• Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	31	65	49
• Government is more effective than some people give it credit for	61	26	45
• Government should guarantee every person enough to eat and a place to sleep [% who agreed]	70	20	49
Best for US Security. The US should:			
• Take a strong an active role in international affairs	72	45	50
• Let other countries take care of their own problems	23	47	42
• Government controls too much of our daily lives [% who agreed]	35	81	65
• Most elected officials care about what people like me think	38	24	24
• Most elected officials don't care what people like me think	57	70	71
• Political correctness often gets used to keep people from speaking their minds [% who agreed}	59	85	72
• Too much wealth in this country is controlled by the few people at the top [% who agreed]	93	53	74

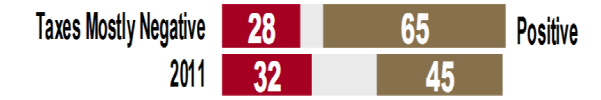
Changes in Attitudes: 2005 –2017

These graphs compare the core question answers to previous years. Respondents were given two statements and asked which one comes closest to their opinion. The top bar in graph is the 2017 answer. Note that some items were asked in different years and some were not asked previously.

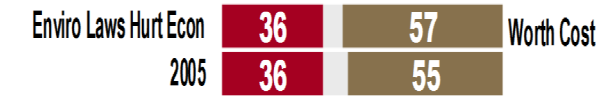
- Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents.
- Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and healthcare.



- Taxes are mostly positive because they are how we pay for important things that make our quality of life good - such as health care, education, and roads.
- Taxes are mostly negative because they take money out of people's pockets and hold back economic growth and the creation of wealth.

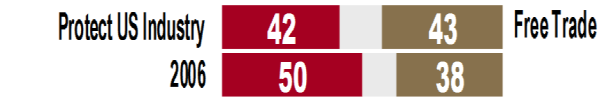


- Strict environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy
- Strict environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost

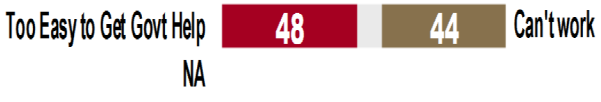


Best for the US economy:

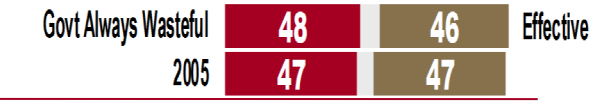
- The federal government should promote and protect US industry
- The federal government should promote free and open trade



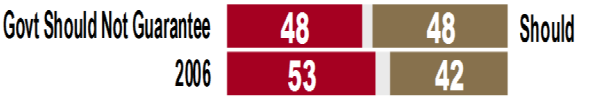
- It is too easy for people to get government benefits without having to do anything to earn them.
- The reason most people get government benefits is because they are unable to work or can't find work.



- Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient
- Government is more effective than some people give it credit for

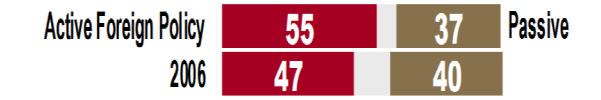


- Government should guarantee every person enough to eat and a place to sleep

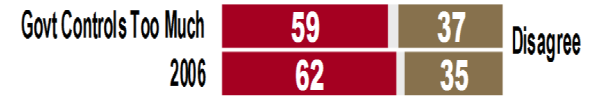


Best for US Security, The US should::

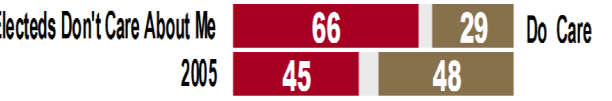
- Take a strong and active role in international affairs
- Let other countries take care of their own problems



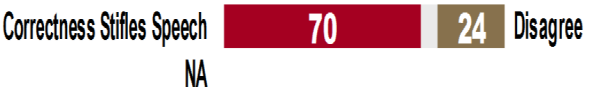
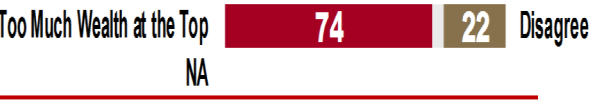
- Government controls too much of our daily lives



- Most elected officials care about what people like me think
- Most elected officials don't care what people like me think



- Political correctness often gets used to keep people from speaking their minds



- Too much wealth in this country is controlled by the few people at the top