



JULY 7, 2011

Governor Candidates Ready, but Voters Are Not

The race for Governor got underway this month, but you would not know it by asking the voters. When presented with a list of eight potential and actual candidates, half of the voters interviewed for this month's *Elway Poll* could not or would not pick a favorite.

The conventional wisdom is that Rob McKenna and Jay Inslee have cleared the field for their run for Governor. But the election is 17 months away. What if there were more candidates? Are these two acclaimed front runners vulnerable to a challenge? That is the question the *Elway Poll* set out to test. We included just about every potential candidate on The Great Mentioner's list, including several who have declared their intention not to run.

It turns out that, this time the conventional wisdom is looking pretty wise. McKenna polled at 20% and Inslee at 17% in this survey. No other candidate scored above 3%.

The horse race numbers for McKenna and Inslee are meaningless at this stage, of course. What is notable is that 63% of voters are not ready to support either one of them. Theoretically, with nearly 2/3 of voters yet to decide, there does appear to be room for another candidate. It has happened before. Dan Evans was at 3% in the polls at a later stage than this when he first ran successfully for Governor in 1964. But that was in a galaxy long ago and far away.

The reality of modern campaigns, and the fundraising required to mount them, makes it very unlikely that another candidate could put together a successful campaign.

Still, it is remarkable that 17 months before an election for an open governor's office Rob McKenna and Jay Inslee have all but pre-empted any other candidates.

Prior to the horserace question, we included a more generic question which shed some light on the road to the Governor's mansion.

As everyone reading this knows, Washington has not elected a Republican Governor since 1980. At this stage of the campaign, voters do not appear ready to change that in this election.

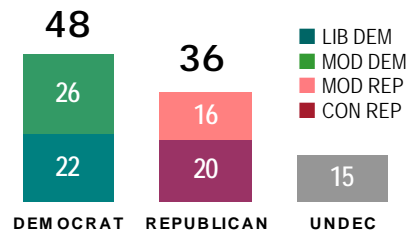
Asked which type of candidate they were most likely to support, 48% said a Democrat and 36% said a Republican. More specifically:

- 22% said a "liberal Democrat"
- 26% said a "moderate Democrat"
- 16% said a "moderate Republican" and
- 20% said a "conservative Republican."

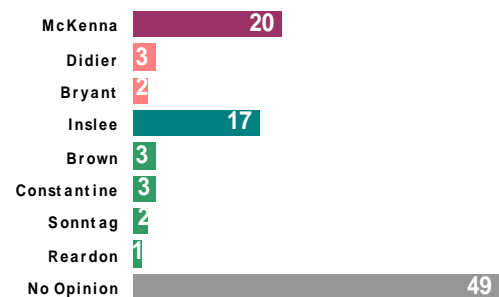
There are a number of ways to interpret these findings:

- Washington's default position still gives a sizable advantage to the Democrat;
- The ideological bases of the two parties are evenly matched. The support was equivalent for a "Liberal Democrat" and a "Conservative Republican";
- The plurality is still in the middle: 42% would support a moderate of one party or the other;
- The Republican support is more ideologically "compact." There were 7 supporters of a moderate Democrat for every 4 supporters of a moderate Republican.

PREFERRED TYPE OF CANDIDATE



INCLINED TO SUPPORT TODAY



These features of the political terrain indicate the path to victory for each candidate. Inslee has the high ground by virtue of being the Democrat in the race. For Inslee, job number one is to consolidate the built-in advantage for the Democrat candidate, then win over enough of the undecided voters to carry the day. That is not automatic: of the respondents in this survey inclined to vote for a Democrat, only 34% are currently inclined to vote for Inslee. This included 38% of those wanting to vote for a “liberal Democrat” and 31% of those preferring a “moderate Democrat.”

These findings indicate that Inslee would not face much difficulty consolidating the Democrats, however. No other potential Democrat candidate got traction in this survey. A list of four Democrat office holders—including State Auditor Brian Sonntag, the highest Democrat vote-getter in the state—totaled 9% between them.

Republican voters are somewhat more unified than the Democrats. In this survey, 46% of those inclined to vote for a Republican supported McKenna, including 48% of those preferring a “conservative Republican” and 44% of those preferring a “moderate Republican.”

Nevertheless, McKenna has a more difficult challenge on paper than Inslee has. Independents leaned toward a Democrat by a margin of 37% to 34%. Respondents who expressed no preference in the horse race question were more inclined to vote for a Democrat than a Republican by 46% to 31% margin.

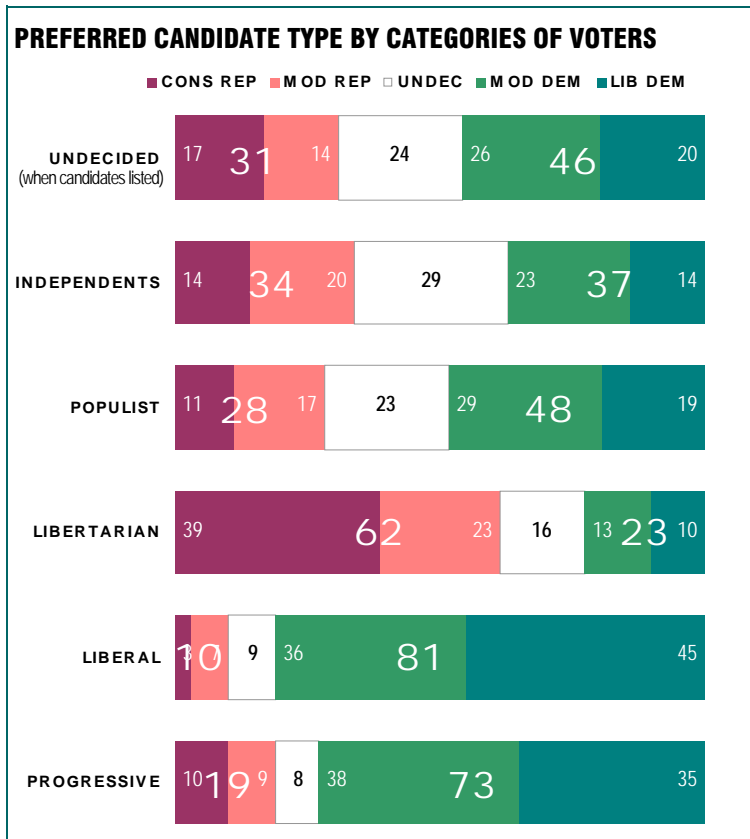
McKenna is seen as the most moderate Republican to run for governor in a generation. But moderate Republicans are the smallest team on the field. McKenna must win over the lion’s share of the undecided voters plus some moderate Democrats, while keeping the conservative Republicans on board. The ideology types do not suggest a clear path. Not only were progressives and liberals overwhelmingly inclined to for a Democrat, but so were a majority of populists. Only libertarians were inclined to vote Republican.

McKenna has to hope that the prospect of finally winning the Governor’s office will be enough to keep conservative Republicans enthused while he courts voters predisposed to support moderate Democrats.

Of course this is just one snapshot of the attitudinal terrain. Candidates and campaigns matter. External events intervene. The campaigns have plenty of time to develop and deploy strategies, adjust and redeploy.

It is going to be a long campaign. It will seem even longer than it actually is because there are only two candidates. Voters are about to be treated to watching the same two guys pounding each other for a year and a half. Both Inslee and McKenna are likable fellows. But modern campaigning decrees that you have to “drive up your opponents negatives.” The winner is the guy voters dislike least. Small wonder the voters are in no hurry to get started.

Beyond the sheer mind-numbing effect of so long a campaign is the prospect of the eventual winner entering office in a highly polarized atmosphere so beaten up, with such high voter disapproval, that the traditional honeymoon will be over before the Inaugural Ball. That is a poll for another day. ☒



Sample Profile

Live telephone interviews were conducted between June 28-30, 2011 with 408 Washington voters, selected at random from voter lists. 8% of the interviews were conducted on cell phones. The data were weighted by age to bring the categories into closer approximation of the electorate. The margin of sampling error is ±5% at the 95% level of confidence. This means, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the results would be within ±5% of the results reported here at least 95 times.

REGION

Seattle	11%
King County (outside Seattle)	16%
Pierce + Kitsap Counties	16%
North Puget Sound (Snohomish to Whatcom)	19%
Western WA (Clallam to Clark)	18%
Eastern WA	20%

GENDER

Male	50%
Female	50%

AGE

18-35	16%
36-50	27%
51-64	29%
65+	28%

PARTY ID

Democrat	37%
Republican	24%
Independent	39%

VOTE HISTORY

0-1 Votes in last 4 elections	21%
2 Votes	19%
3 Votes	19%
4 Votes in last 4 elections	41%

INCOME

\$25,000 or less	9%
\$25 to \$50,000	18%
\$50 to \$75,000	20%
\$75,000 to \$100,000	16%
Over \$100,000	9%
No Answer	27%

The Elway Poll

The Elway Poll is an independent, non-partisan analysis of public opinion in Washington and the Northwest available exclusively to subscribers.

SUBSCRIPTION: An annual subscription is \$250.

PROPRIETARY QUESTIONS: Each month, space is reserved in the questionnaire to allow subscribers to ask proprietary questions. The fee for proprietary questions is \$600 per question. You will receive the results of your question(s) with full crosstabulations within three days after the interviews are completed.

CROSSTABS: A full set of cross-tabulation tables for any month's survey is available for \$100.

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Gregoire's Positive Job Ratings Continue to Slide

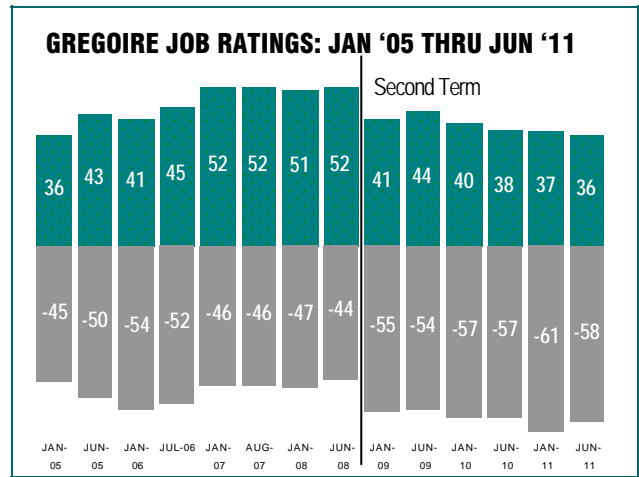
Governor Chris Gregoire's net job performance ratings ticked slightly upward this month, owing to fewer voters giving her a negative rating than in January. Overall, however, her ratings have deteriorated throughout her second term.

Gregoire started her second term with 41% positive ratings ("excellent"+"good") and 55% negative ("only fair"+"poor") for a net of -14. This month, the net rating was -22 (36% positive - 58% negative)

Her positive numbers have lost about a point every six months since January of last year to 36% last week. Her negative ratings have hovered around 57-58%.

The best ratings of her term came in the re-election campaign year of 2008.

The Elway Poll has measured gubernatorial job ratings every six months since 1992.



WORDING OF QUESTIONS

- As you may know, Governor Gregoire has decided not to run for re-election next year. The election is a long way off, but as things stand today, which of the following are you most likely to support for Governor: (ROTATE)
 A Conservative Republican...A Moderate Republican...A Moderate Democrat
 A Liberal Democrat
- Several candidates may run for Governor next year. As things stand today, whom would you support if the candidates were: (ROTATE)
 Republican Rob McKenna...Republican Bill Bryant...Republican Clint Didier
 Democrat Dow Constantine...Democrat Lisa Brown...Democrat Aaron Reardon
 Democrat Jay Inslee...Democrat Brian Sonntag.
- First, overall, how would you rate the job that Chris Gregoire is doing as Governor? Would you say...(ROTATE)
 Excellent...Good...Only Fair...Poor