17th Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey

Social Science Research Center

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Publication Information

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Past surveys are currently available for download in *.pdf format.
For questions concerning the survey, please call (208) 426-1835.
Copies are also available to Idahoans upon request, and archive copies are available at the Albertsons Library at Boise State University.

Executive Summary

Core Questions

- Nearly two-thirds (63.6%) of Idahoans believe the state is headed in the right direction.
- Unlike the previous year, education is seen as a more important issue facing the State of Idaho than the economy.
- Local government remains most favorable among Idahoans in terms of trust and responsiveness compared to state or federal governments.

Fiscal & Tax Policy

- Similar percentages of Idahoans believe that they get the most from their tax money at the local (36.1%) and state (33.2%) levels of government.
- 22.6% of Idahoans think that the local property tax is the least fair tax followed by 18.0% who think the federal income tax is the least fair.
- Although 48.2% of Idahoans believe that the local property tax is too high, 42.9% think it is about right.
- 40.8% of Idahoans think the assessed value of their home is comparable to a fair selling price.
- While 31.2% of Idahoans think the initiative process is appropriate for making complex tax policy decisions, 27.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, reflecting uncertainty on the issue.
- When asked if they support a ballot initiative to limit property tax to 1% of assessed property value, 56.8% of Idahoans said they support or strongly support an initiative.
- 65.8% of respondents indicated that the state should cut spending rather than increase other taxes to replace the lost revenue in the event that a 1% initiative is approved.

Energy & Environmental Policy

- Renewable forms of energy such as wind, solar, and hydropower are viewed as more favorable than traditional forms of energy such as coal, oil, natural gas, or nuclear energy.
- About 61.8% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that other state and local entities should be included in the decision process when approving power plants other than the county commissioners from one particular county.
- To encourage the development of small renewable power generation facilities, 62.0% of Idahoans said that they are willing to pay a “slightly higher” utility rate to do so.
- More than a third of Idahoans (35.3%) said that they support breaching the four lower Snake River dams to restore Idaho salmon runs.

Miscellaneous Policy

- Healthcare costs and public school funding are the most important issues that the governor and the legislature should deal with in the second session of the 58th Idaho Legislature, with 48.0% and 45.0% of respondents indicating these two issues were “extremely important” respectively
- About 52% of respondents indicated that they would support or strongly an amendment to the Idaho Constitution to ban same-sex marriages, while 31.2% opposed or strongly opposed.

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Introduction

Annually, the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Boise State University conducts a statewide survey of Idahoans to identify public policy opinions and concerns. The results of the survey are available to both policy makers and the public. This report conveys the full results on a range of contemporary policy issues, collected during a public opinion poll in the fall of 2005. An executive summary was provided in January 2006 to legislators, state agencies, the press, and the public prior to the commencement of the second session of the 58th Idaho Legislature.

To accurately project the results of this survey across the state, the survey data is weighted according to the proportion of the total state population within each of the six geographic regions shown in Figure 1. For more information regarding the methods used in the survey, see the technical report in Appendix C. Prior to year 2002, frequency data was used without weighting and regions were assigned a 'quota' to ensure adequate statewide representation. While the differences generally remain well within the acceptable margin of error, population-weighted data more accurately portrays the statewide population. The difference in methodology is more apparent in the regional data where larger variation from the overall frequency data will be obvious.

The survey was administered to 534 Idaho adults (+18 years old) by telephone between November 3rd, 2005 trhough December 4th, 2005. The overall statewide population is represented by the survey sample at a standard error estimated to be +/- 4% at the 95% confidence level.

Since its inception in 1990, the survey has included a set of "core questions" which have been asked each year. These core questions relate to the problems facing Idaho, perceptions of and confidence in government, opinions on taxes, and satisfaction with program and service areas. Additional questions are asked that attempt to identify or clarify contemporary issues that are of interest and concern to Idaho citizens.

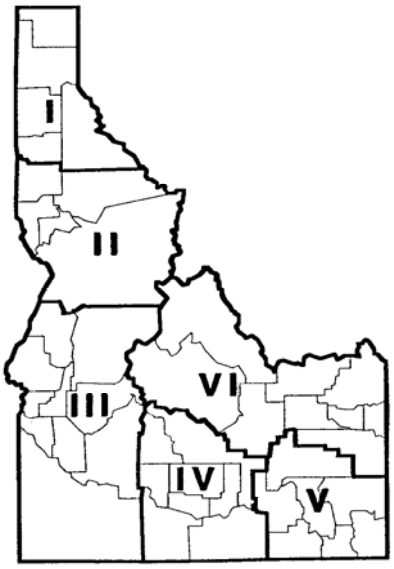
Additionally, a stratified sample also allows for general comparisons across six geographic regions. (Statistically speaking, the survey results are representative of the population of each region.) **Figure 1** on page 2 maps the regions in the state, and **Table 1** identifies the standard error of the sample for each region as well as the weighted population basis used for the analysis.

The survey instrument, technical requirements, reporting and analysis for the survey were prepared by the SSRC. The Institutional Review Board at BSU approved the research protocol and questionnaire for use with human subjects. Respondents to the survey are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and they are allowed to refuse to answer the survey or any question within the survey.

Clearwater Research, Inc. of Boise, ID utilized their Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system to collect the survey data and deliver a weighted sample and Technical Report to the SSRC for analysis. Clearwater Research, Inc. can be contacted at (208) 376-3376, or visit their website at http://www.clearwater-research.com.

The Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey (AIPPS) is intended to field public opinion both at a state level as well as to identify differences across six geographic regions, which are comprised of counties in Idaho (see Figure 1). A stratified sample across the regions allows for statistical comparison. The standard error for the sample of each region as well as the weighted population basis used for the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Figure 1. The six geographic regions used for the Annual Idaho Public Policy Surveys, including their respective counties.



Region 1: Panhandle	Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah, Shoshone
Region 2: North Central	Latah, Clearwater, Nez Perce, Lewis, Idaho
Region 3: Southwest	Adams, Valley, Washington, Payette, Gem, Boise, Canyon, Ada, Elmore, Owyhee
Region 4: South Central	Camas, Blaine, Gooding, Lincoln, Minidoka, Jerome, Twin Falls, Cassia
Region 5: Southeast	Bingham, Power, Bannock, Oneida, Franklin, Bear Lake, Caribou
Region 6: East Central	Lemhi, Custer, Butte, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, Madison, Teton, Bonneville

Table 1. Actual number of respondents, percent of total responses, and standard errors by region; as well as regional weighting using the percentages and population figures given.

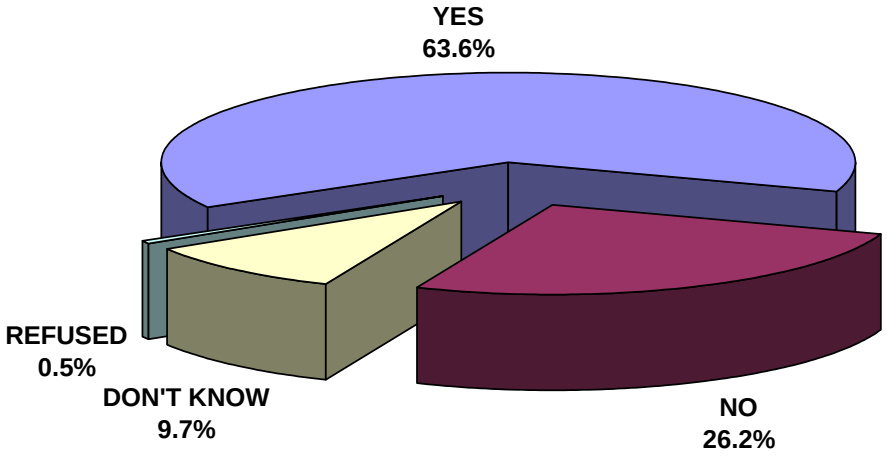
	Actual			**Weighted***	
	Number of responses (N)	**% of total responses**	**Standard error at 95% confidence interval**	**% of state population**	**Population**
Region 1	88	16.5	±10.5	14.3	141,824
Region 2	87	16.3	±10.5	8.0	79,190
Region 3	91	17.1	±10.4	42.5	422,151
Region 4	83	15.5	±10.7	12.1	120,827
Region 5	92	17.2	±10.2	11.0	108,964
Region 6	93	17.4	±10.1	12.1	121,349
Total (Statewide)	**534**	**100.0**	**±4.0**	**100.0**	**994,305**

*Results are weighted for the adult population of Idaho (18 years of age or older).

For selected regional results see Appendix A.

Core Questions

In general terms, do think the state is headed in the right direction?

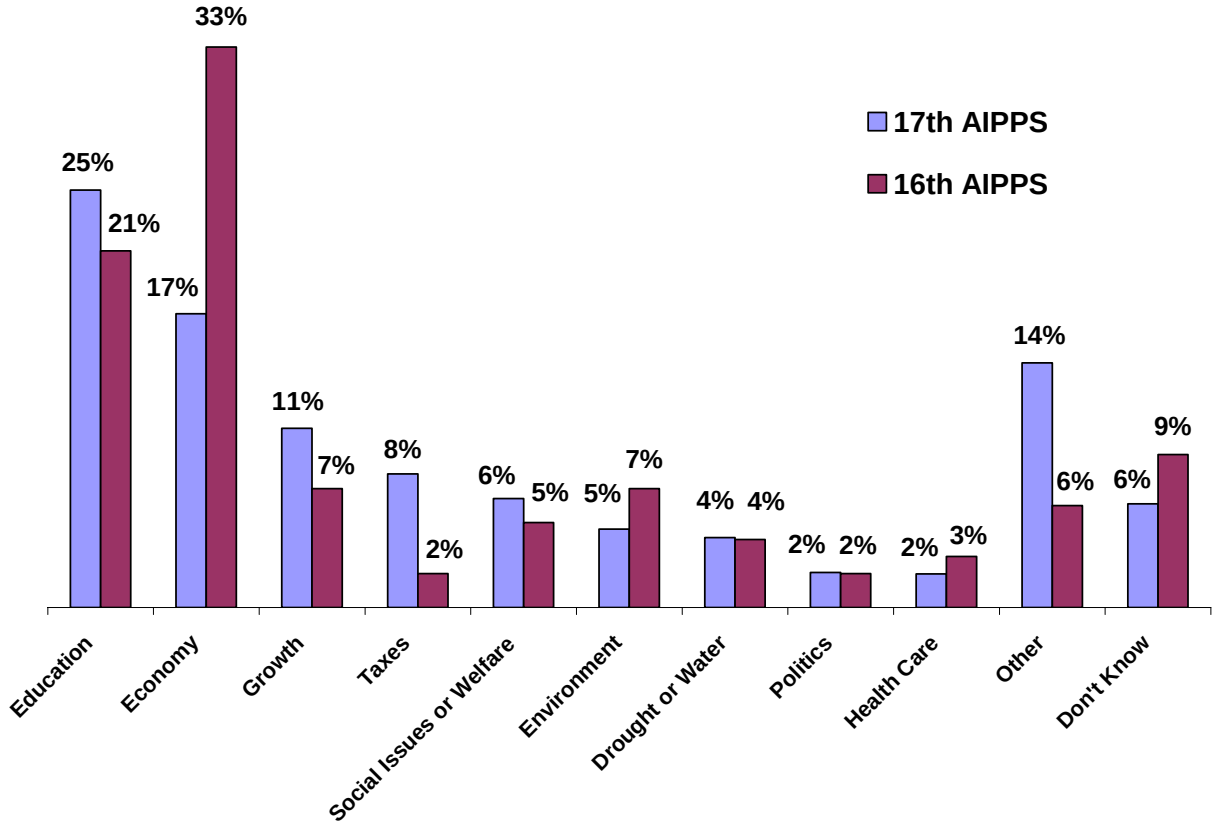


N=534

Nearly 64% of the respondents believe that the state is headed in the right direction.

- This percentage dropped since last year, when 70% of the respondents believed the state was headed in the right direction.
- Region 6 showed the highest level of satisfaction with 70.9% of respondents saying the state is headed in the right direction, compared with Region 1 where 51.3% of respondents believe the state is headed in the right direction.
- Region 2 showed the highest level of dissatisfaction, with 33.3% of respondents saying the state is *not* headed in the right direction.
- While 77.5% of Republicans believed the state is headed in the right direction, only 44.5% of Democrats believe the state is headed in the right direction, and 57.7% of those identifying themselves as Independents believed the state is headed in the right direction.

In your opinion, what is the single most important issue facing Idaho today?

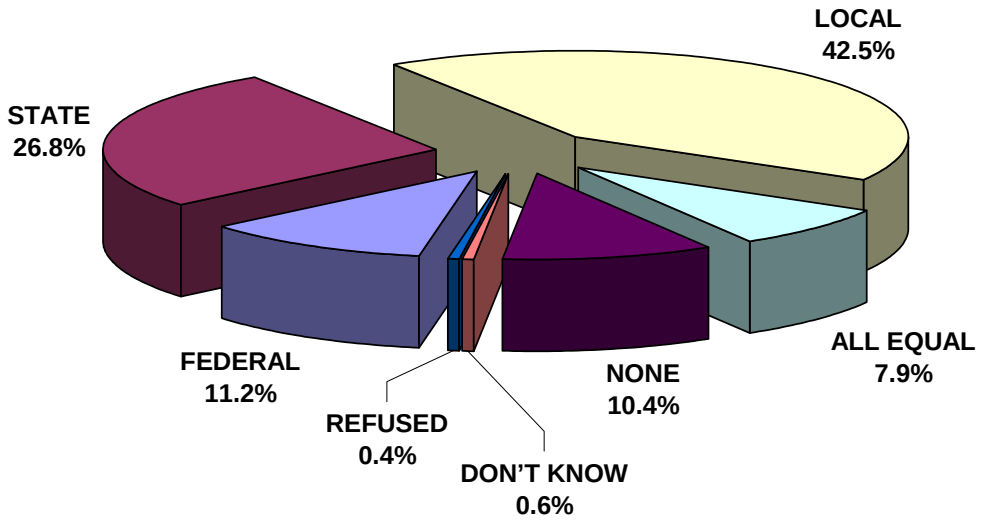


17th AIPPS: N=534; 16th AIPPS: N=531

Education was identified as the single most important issue facing Idaho, with 25% of this year's respondents expressing concern about this issue.

- *Last year a staggering 33% of respondents identified the economy as the single most important issue, which dropped dramatically to 17% this year.*
- The concern over the economy last year has shifted to other issues such as education, growth, and taxes this year.
- "Other" issues not conventionally identified jumped from 6% to 14% compared to last year.

In general, do you have the most trust in federal, state, or local government?

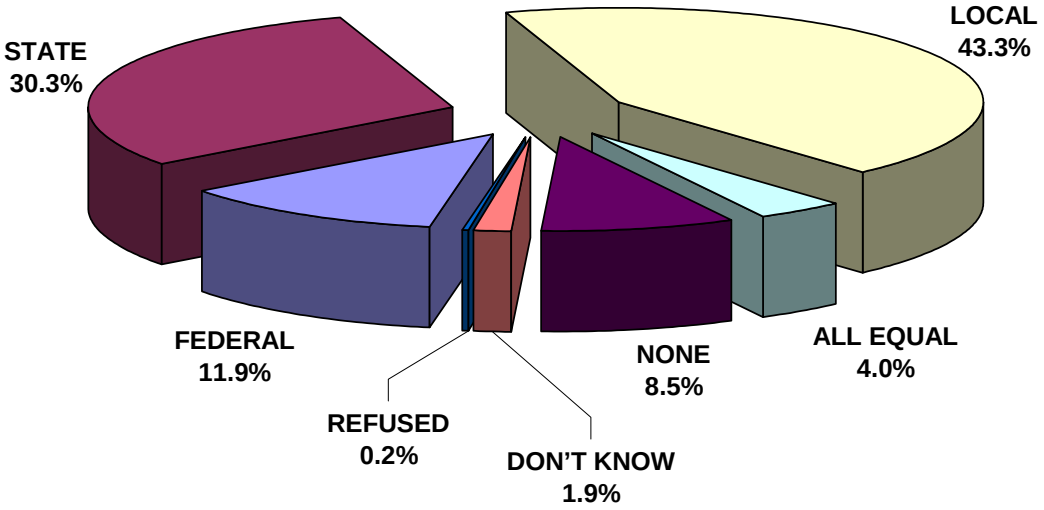


N=534

As usual, most of the respondents maintained more trust in local government than any other level of government, with 42.5% of respondents trusting their local governments more than state or federal governments.

- *Trust in local government has grown from 38% two years ago and 40% last year.*
- Democrats showed the highest level of trust in local government (50.5%), followed by Independents (44.4%), while 38.2% of Republicans trust local government the most.
- Republicans showed the highest level of trust in both state and federal governments, at 34.4% and 13.7% respectively.
- Region 2 showed the highest level of trust in federal government (19.9%), while Region 5 showed the highest level of trust in state government (35.2%), and Region 1 showed the highest level of trust in local government (50.1%).

Which level of government best responds to your needs?



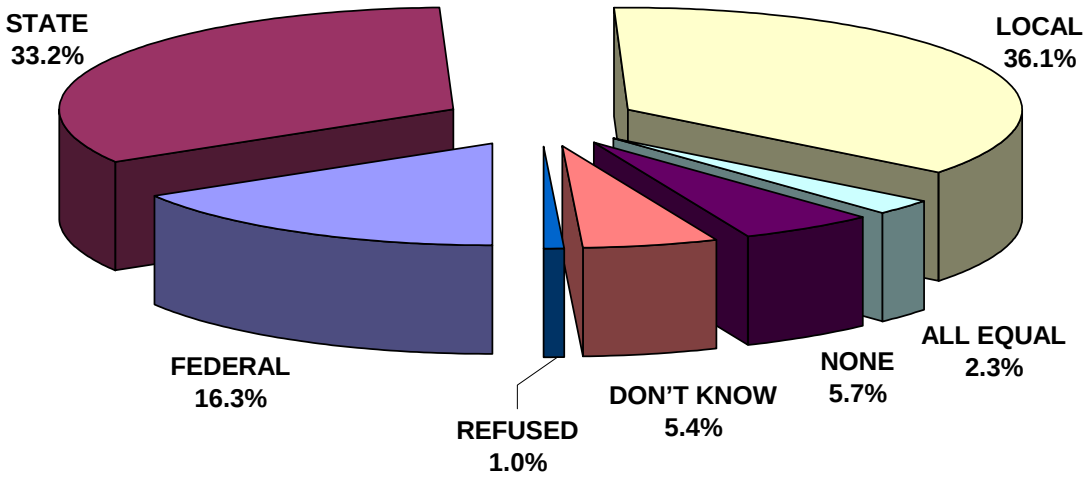
N=534

Not surprisingly, 43.3% of respondents indicated that local government best responds to their needs, which is generally reflective of the relative accessibility of local government compared to state or federal governments.

- The percent of respondents who indicated that local government best responds to their needs was highest among Independents (46.2%), followed by Democrats (40.9%), and lowest among Republicans (39.7%).
- 34.0% of Republicans indicated that state government responds their needs best, while 13.8% of Democrats indicated that federal government responds to their needs best.
- Those indicating that federal government responds to their needs best was highest in Region 2 (14.8%), those indicating that state government responds to their needs best was highest in Region 5 (36.1%), and those indicating that local government best responds to their needs was highest in Region 6 (51.9%).

Fiscal & Tax Policy

From which level of government do you think you get the most for your tax money?

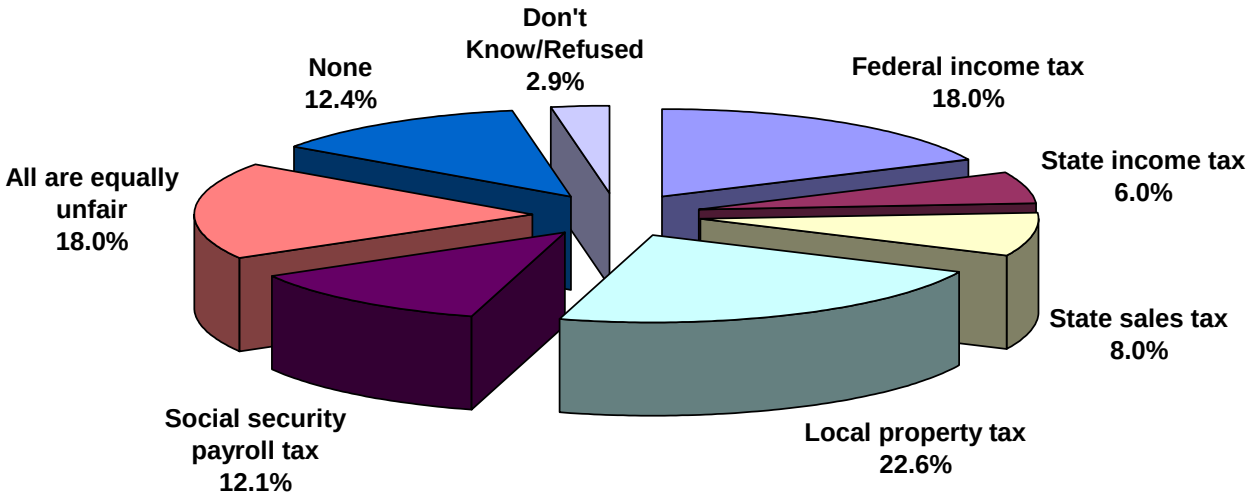


N=534

Continued emphasis in local government is demonstrated by that fact that more respondents (36.1%) believe they get the most from local government in terms of the taxes they pay than other levels of government.

- More Independents indicated that they receive the most for their tax money from local government (39.8%) than Democrats (37.1%) or Republicans (31.9%).
- 41.0% of Republicans believed that they received the most for their tax money from state government, compared to 29.7% of Democrats and 27.5% of Independents.
- Those identifying themselves with "Other" political parties indicated that they receive more for their tax money from federal government (28.3%) than respondents identifying with the two traditional political parties.
- On a regional comparison, the highest level of respondents indicating that the most value for their tax money came from federal government was in Region 2 (23.5%), from state in Region 3 (35.9%), and from local in Region 3 (36.9%).

Which of the following taxes do you think is the least fair?

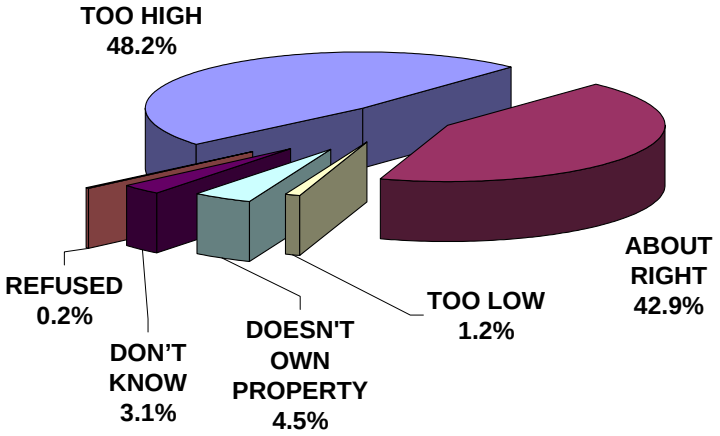


N=534

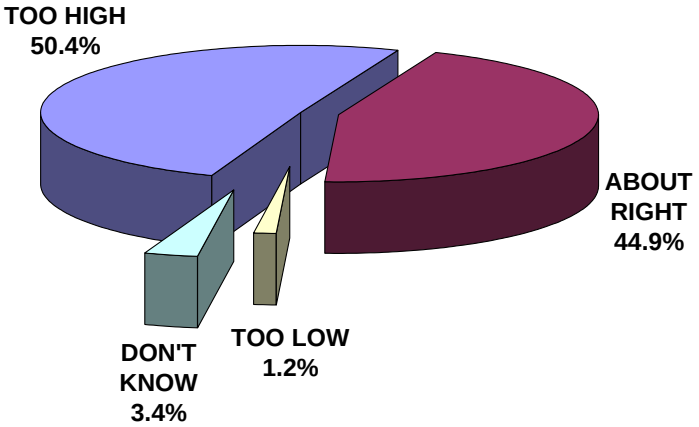
The local property tax was perceived as the least fair tax by 22.6% of respondents.

- *Despite localized movements in favor of reduced property taxes, the percentage of respondents statewide indicating that the local property tax is the least fair tax has dropped from 28% the previous year.*
- However, Northern Idaho (Regions 1 & 2) continues to have highest level of perception in terms of the local property tax being the least fair with 27.6% of respondents in Region 1 and 27.2% of respondents in Region 2.
- Interestingly, more Democrats (26.4%) than Republicans (20.9%) or Independents (23.9%) thought that the local property tax was least fair.

Do you think the amount of local property tax you have to pay in Idaho is too high, about right, or too low?



N=534 (including those who indicated they do not own property)



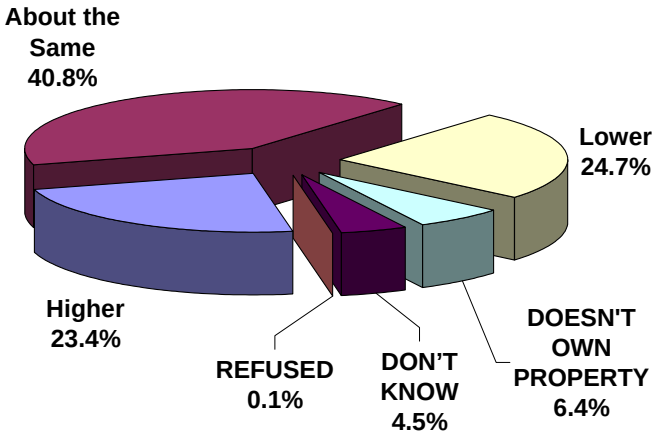
N=516 (not including those who indicated they do not own property)

Eighteen of the 534 respondents indicated that they do not own property when asked if the amount of local property tax they have to pay is too high, about right, or too low.[*] In the second figure, these respondents were removed, and the percentages were recalculated to reflect the remaining responses.

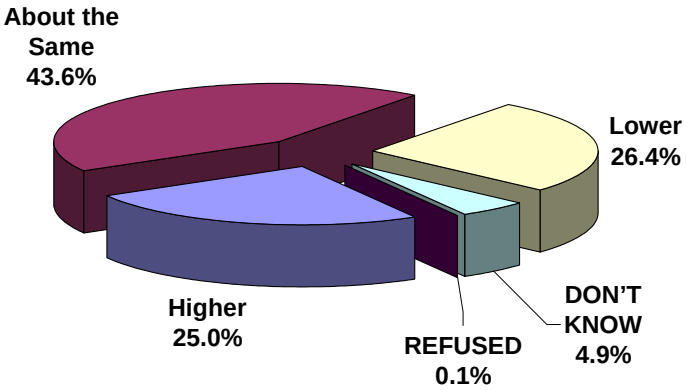
- When those who indicated that they do not own property were removed from the total responses, about half (50.4%) of the remaining respondents believed that the amount of local property tax they have to pay is too high, while slightly less (44.9%) think it is "about right."

[*] The "doesn't own property" response was voluntary (i.e. when respondents were read a list of answers, the options "too high," "about right," and "too low" were read to the respondent but not "don't own property").

How does the assessed value of your property compare to what you think would be a fair selling price?



N=534 (including those who indicated they do not own property)



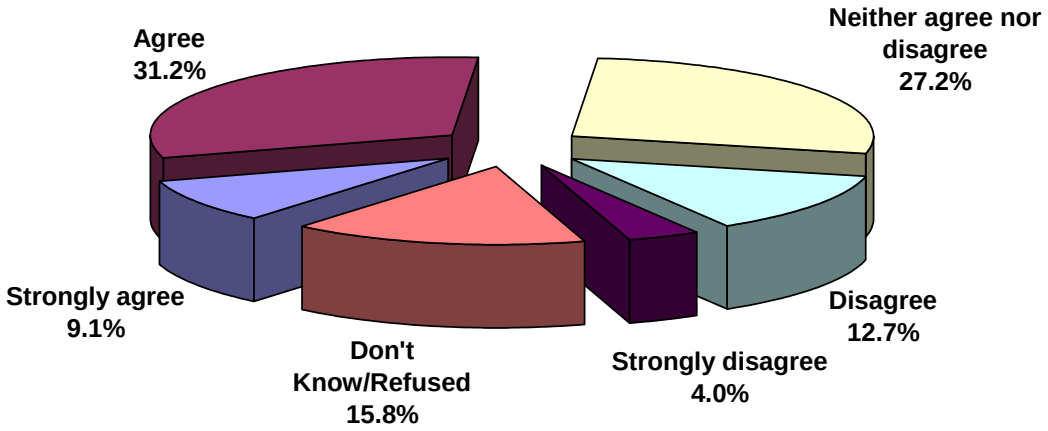
N=500 (not including those who indicated they do not own property)

Thirty-four of the 534 respondents indicated that they do not own property when asked how the assessed value of their home compared to what they believed is a fair selling price.[2] In the second figure, these respondents were removed, and the percentages were recalculated to reflect the remaining responses.

- When those who indicated that they do not own property were removed from the total responses, 43.6% of the remaining respondents believed that the assessed value of the home is about the same as what they think would be a fair selling price.

[2] The "doesn't own property" response was voluntary (i.e. when respondents were read a list of answers, the options "higher," "about the same," and "lower" were read to the respondent but not "don't own property").

How strongly do you agree that the initiative process is an appropriate means for making complex tax policy decisions?

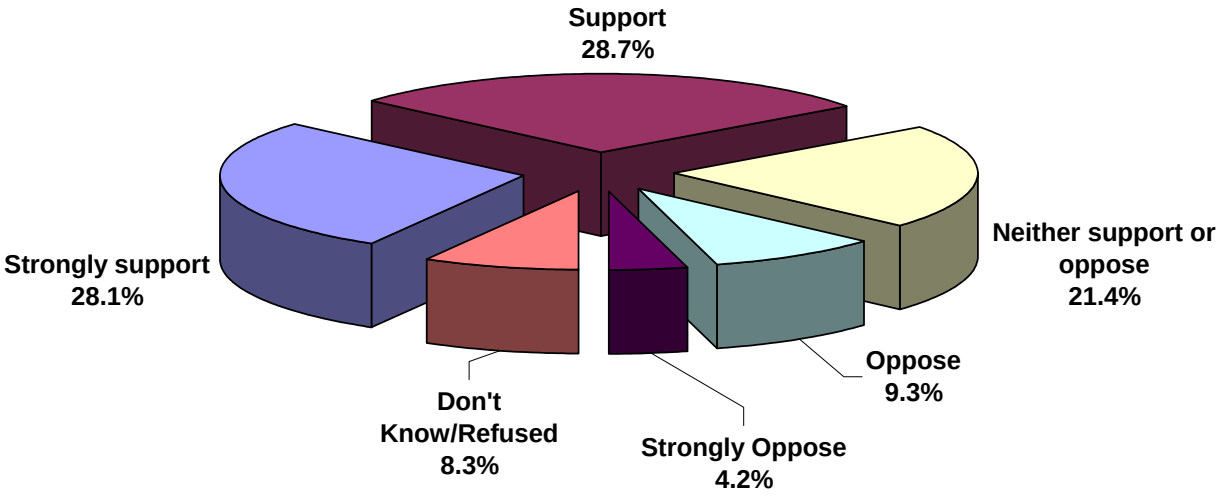


N=534

When asked if the initiative process was appropriate for making complex tax policy decisions, 41.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed.

- 27.2% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, while 16.7% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed.
- Region 4 showed the highest level of support for the ballot initiative, where 17.2% of respondents strongly agreed that the process is appropriate for making complex tax policy decisions.

How strongly would you support a ballot initiative to limit your property taxes to 1% of the assessed value?

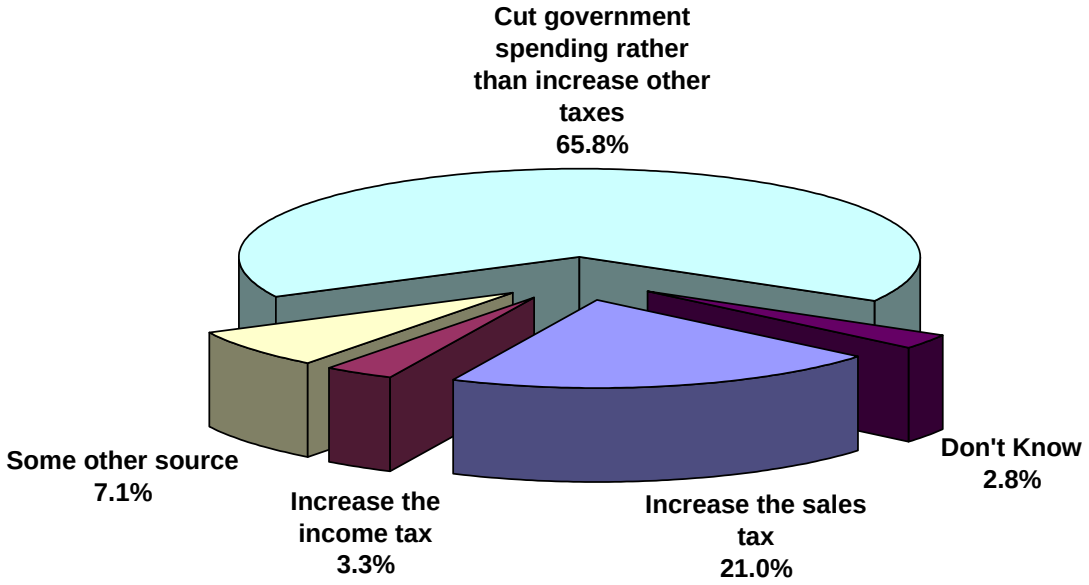


N=534

Support for a 1% property tax ballot initiative was high among respondents, with 28.1% strongly supporting the idea and 28.7% supporting the idea.

- Region 1 had the highest number of respondents indicating they strongly support a 1% ballot initiative, with 33.5%.
- Region 5 had the highest number of respondents indicating they support a 1% initiative, with 36.6%.
- However, strong opposition to a 1% ballot initiative was highest in Region 5, where 9.0% of respondents indicated they were strongly opposed.
- Opposition was also high in Regions 2 and 4 where 20.1% and 18.2% of respondents respectively indicated that they were opposed to a 1% initiative.
- Strong support was highest among Republicans (31.9%), followed by Independents (26.9%), and then Democrats (26.0%).

If the 1% property tax initiative were adopted, how do you think the state should replace the lost property tax revenue?



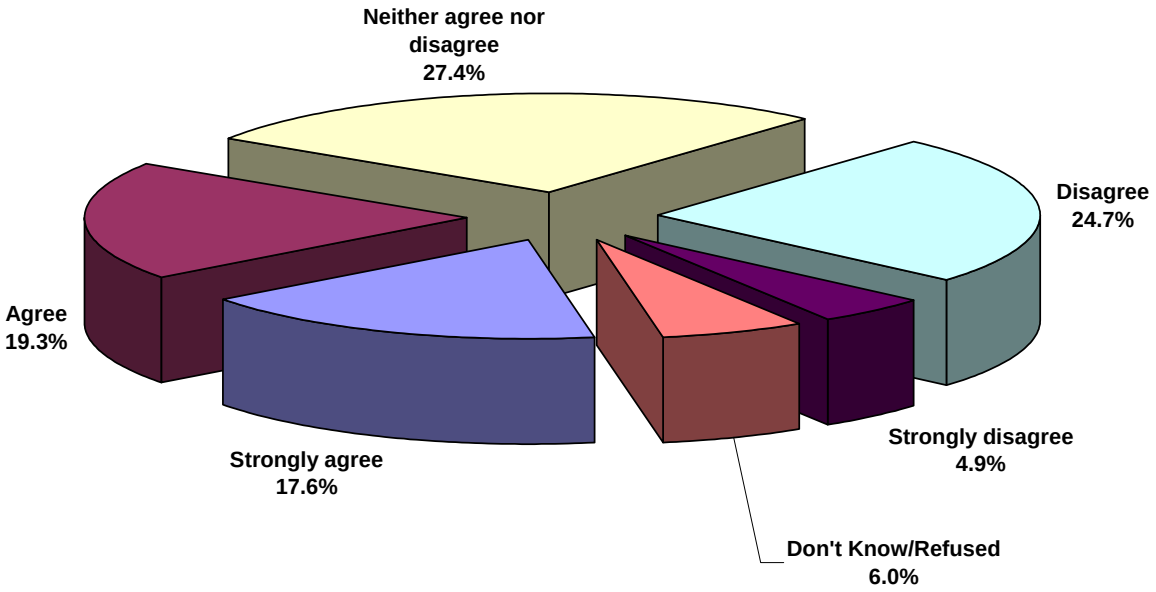
N=308[‡]

Nearly two-thirds (65.8%) of those responding to this question indicated that the state should cut spending rather than increase other taxes if a 1% property tax initiative were to be adopted.

- However, 21.0% of the respondents that favored a 1% property tax initiative thought the state should recover the lost revenue by increasing the sales tax.

[‡] Only respondents that "supported" or "strongly supported" a ballot initiative to limit their property taxes to 1% of the assed value were asked this question.

A homeowner's primary residence is eligible for an exemption of 50% of the assessed value of the home, up to a maximum of $50,000. How strongly do you agree that the 50/50 homeowners' exemption should be expanded even though this expansion will mean a shift in tax burden to other properties like commercial, industrial, and agriculture?

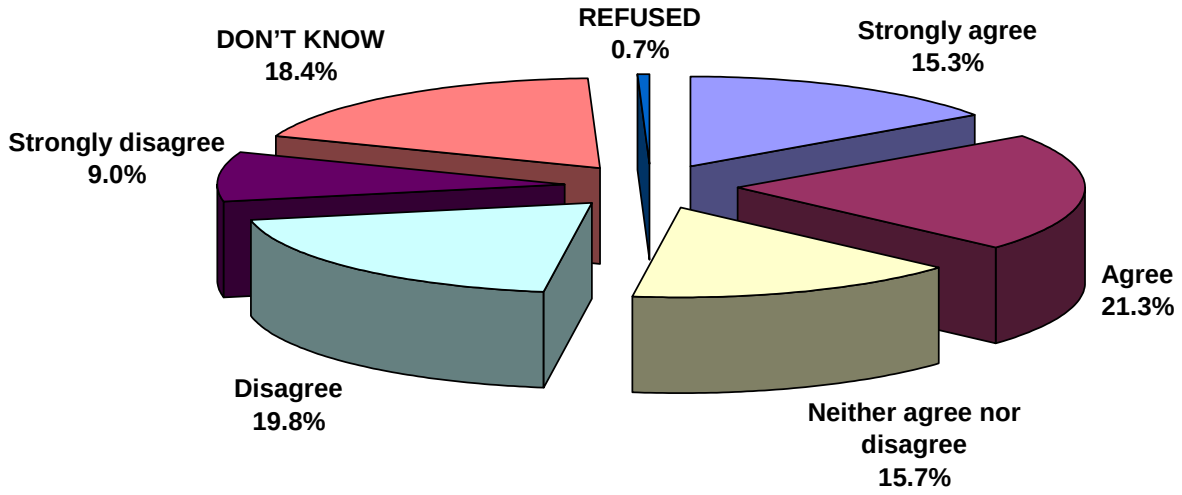


N=534

More than one-third (36.9%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked whether or not the 50/50 homeowner's exemption should be expanded even if it would shift tax burden to other property types.

- However, 27.4% of the respondents were uncertain if the 50/50 homeowner's exemption should be expanded.
- A similar percentage of respondents (24.7%) indicated that they do not favor expanding the 50/50 homeowner's exemption, while 19.3% did favor an expansion.
- Region 1 showed the highest level of support for expanding the homeowner's exemption, where 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed.
- Respondents identifying themselves as Independents showed the highest support for expanding the homeowner's exemption, 43.9% of whom strongly agreed or agreed.

How strongly do you agree or disagree that schools should be allowed to impose development impact fees?



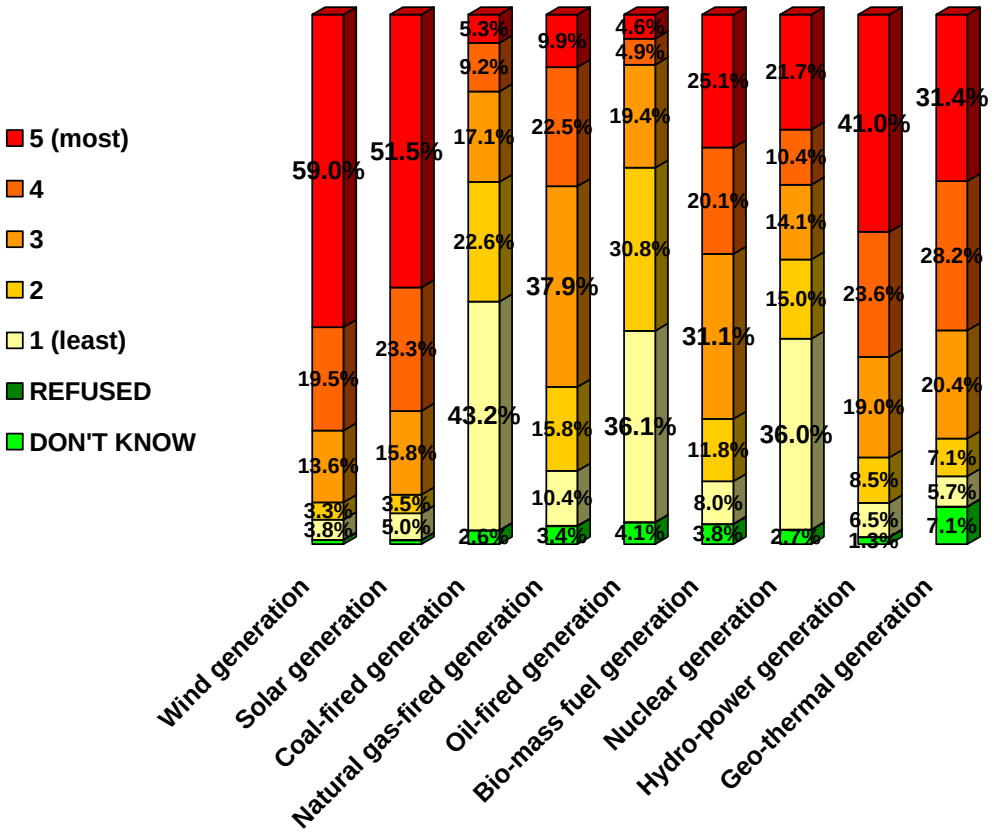
N=534

More than one-third (36.6%) of respondents strongly agree or agree that schools should be allowed to charge development impact fees.

- *Support for impact fees was aligned with the two fastest growing regions of the state, including Region 3 where 44.1% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that schools should be able to impose development impact fees and Region 1 where 36.0% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed.*
- 28.8%of respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the idea that schools should be allowed to charge development impact fees.
- Uncertainty among respondents regarding development impact fees was high with 18.4% of respondents indicating they don't know and another 15.7% of respondents "neither agreed nor disagreed."

Energy & Environmental Policy

Please rate the desirability of the following sources of electricity generation, with 1 being the least desirable and 5 being the most desirable.[§]



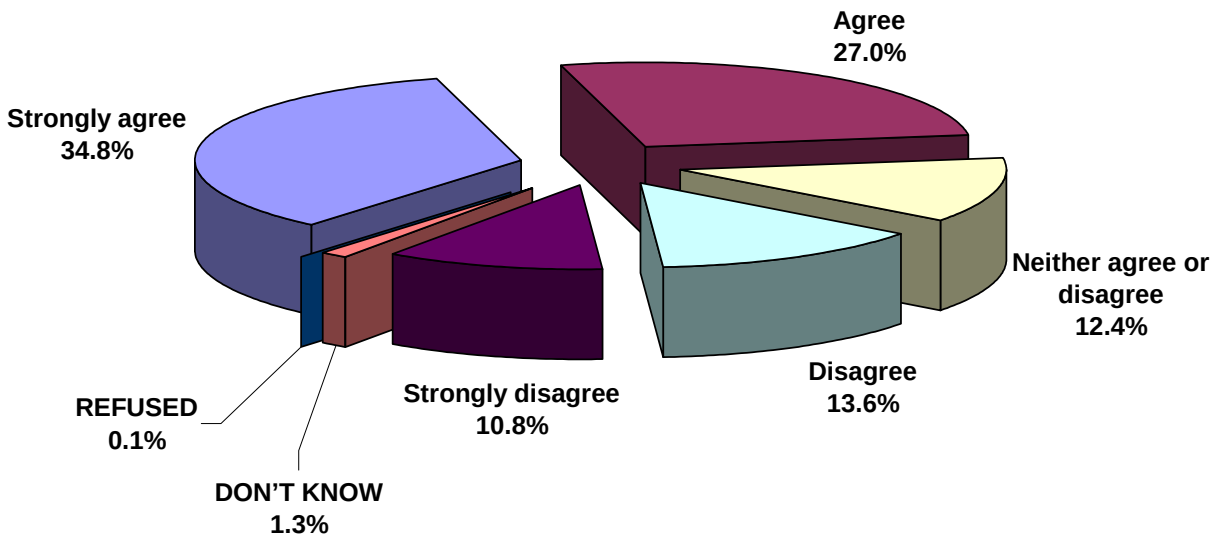
N=534

Renewable forms of energy were most desirable among respondents, including wind generation, solar generation, and hydro-power generation, with 59.0%, 51.5% and 41.0% of respondents indicating these forms of energy are most desirable respectively.

- Coal-fired, oil-fired, and nuclear generation were portrayed the least desirable, among 43.2%, 36.1%, and 36.0% of respondents respectively.

[§] Numerical value lables for "REFUSED" and "DON'T KNOW" that were less than 1% were excluded in this figure.

County commissioners are the only decision-makers involved in deciding the sites for new power plants. How much do you agree that decision-makers from other state and local entities impacted by the decision should be included?

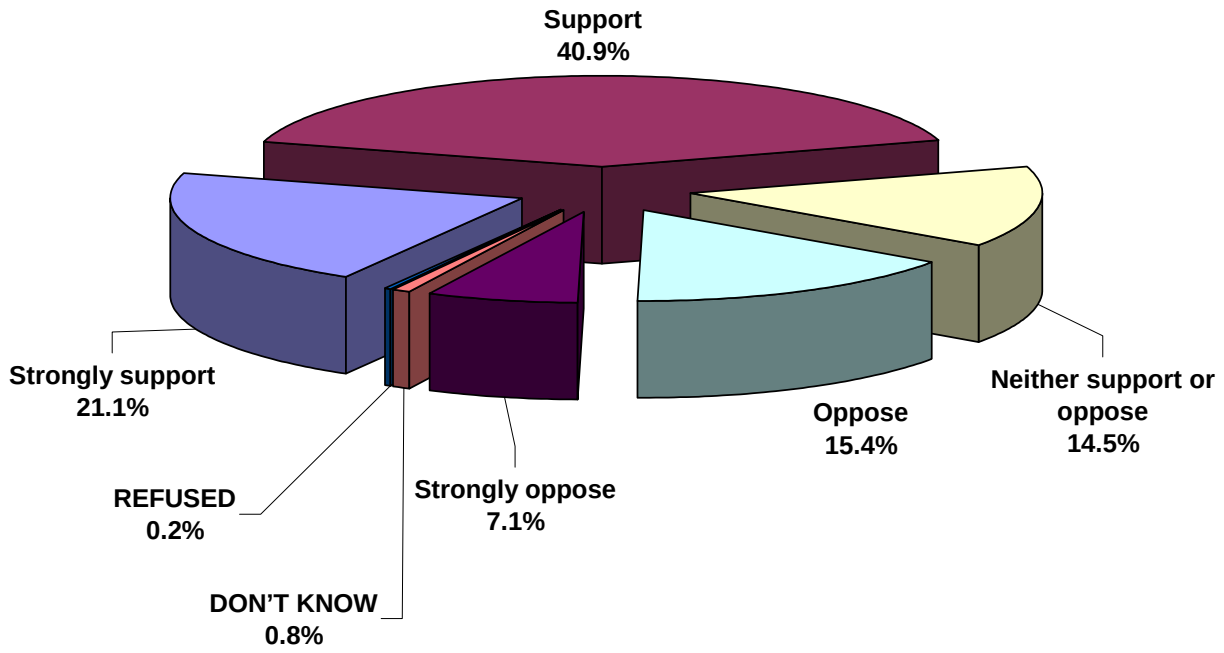


N=534

About 61.8% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if other state and local entities impacted by the decision to approve a site for a power plant should be expanded beyond the county commissioners where the site would be located.

- Support for expanding such decision-making was highest in Regions 4 and 1, where 42.5% and 39.2% of respondents strongly agreed respectively.
- 45.9% of Democrats "strongly agreed" compared to 33.5% of Republicans.

How much do you support paying a slightly higher electric utility rate to encourage the development of small renewable power generation facilities such as wind power generation in the state of Idaho?

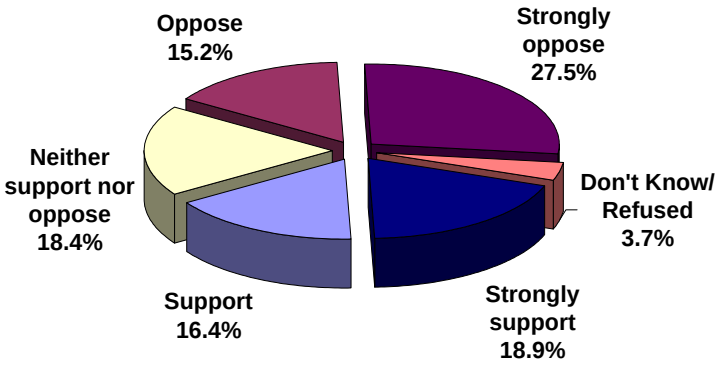


N=534

An even 62.0% of respondents strongly support or support paying a slightly higher electric utility rate to encourage development of small renewable power generation facilities such as wind power.

- 22.5% of respondents strongly oppose or oppose increasing their electric utility rate to support small renewable electric generation facilities.
- Strong support was highest in Region 4 at 27.8%.
- 30.0% of Democrats and 23.0% of Independents strongly support a higher rate to encourage small renewable power facilities compared to 17.6% of Republicans.

How strongly do you support the breaching of the four lower Snake River dams to restore salmon runs in Idaho?

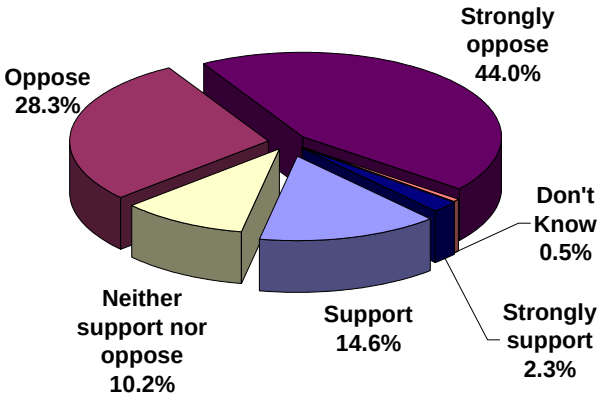


N=534

42.7% of respondents strongly oppose or oppose breaching the four lower Snake River dams for the benefit of Idaho salmon runs compared to 35.3% who strongly support or support.

The following question was asked of those who "strongly opposed" of "opposed":

If key concerns over breaching such as lost barging and hydroelectricity were replaced with alternatives at a similar cost to the public, how strongly would you support breaching the four lower Snake River dams to restore Idaho salmon runs?



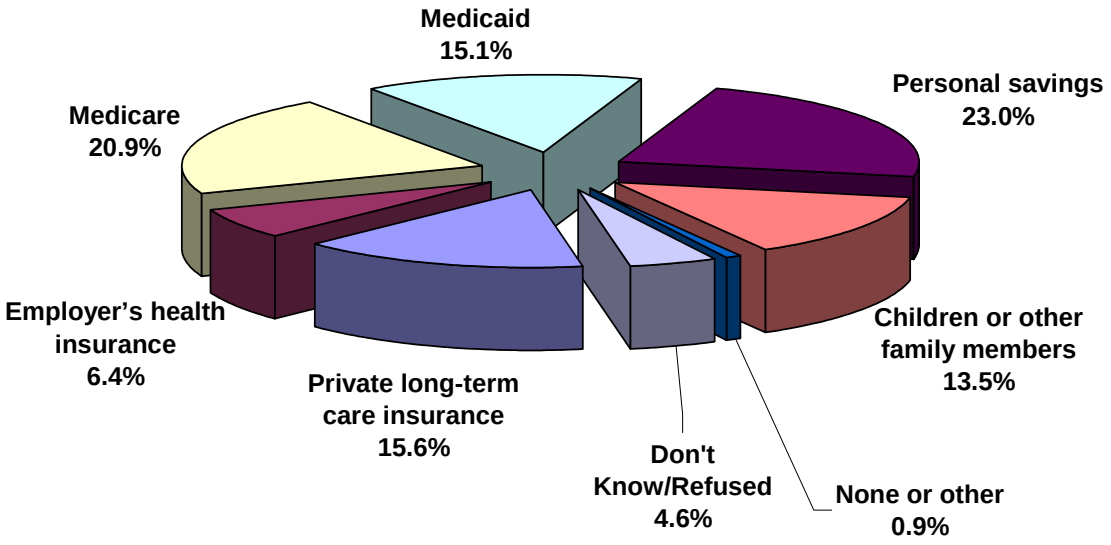
N=230**

When asked if they would support breaching by replacing the dams with alternatives at similar cost, 16.9% of this subset of respondents strongly support or support breaching the lower four Snake River dams, for an additional 7.2% of all respondents.

** In the second question regarding the four lower Snake River dams, only respondents that answered "strongly oppose" or "oppose" in the first question regarding the four lower Snake River dams were asked the second question.

Healthcare Policy

If you or a family member need long-term care, such as a nursing home, assisted living or extensive home care at some point in the future, which of the following do you think will pay for most of the cost?

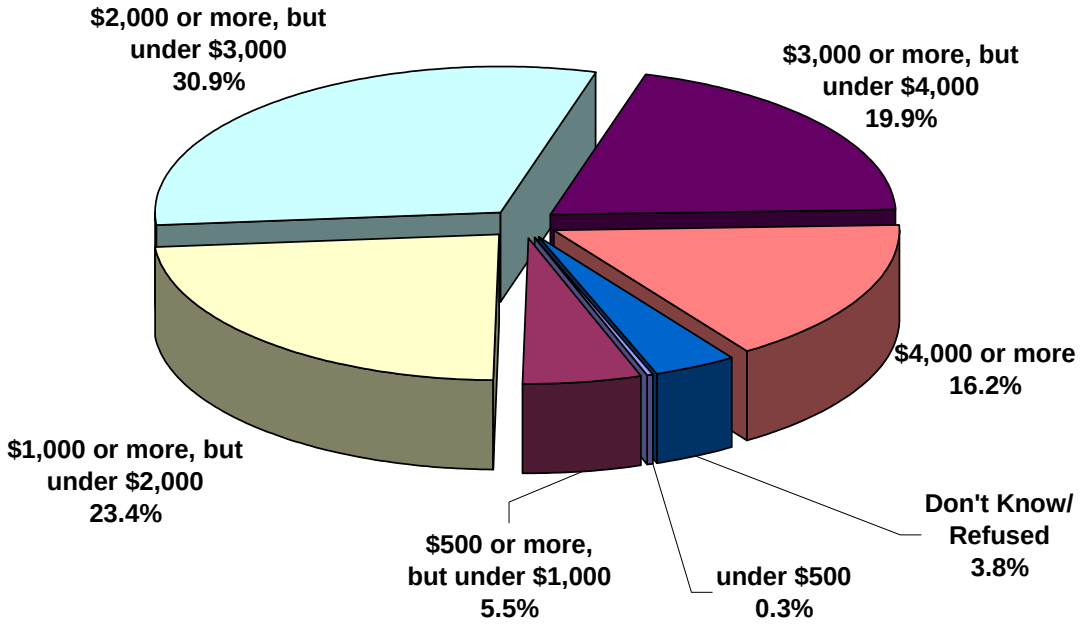


N=534

When respondents were asked how they thought long-term care would be paid for if they or a family member required long-term care in the future, 20.9% thought Medicare would cover the cost, followed by 23.0% who thought personal savings, 15.6% who thought private long-term care insurance, and 15.1% who thought Medicaid would cover the cost.

- In Region 2, 38.6% of respondents thought Medicare would pay for long-term care.
- In Region 6, 24.7% of respondents thought Medicaid would pay for long-term care.
- In Region 4, 32.7% of respondents though personal savings would pay for long-term care.

How much do you estimate a nursing home in Idaho costs for one month?



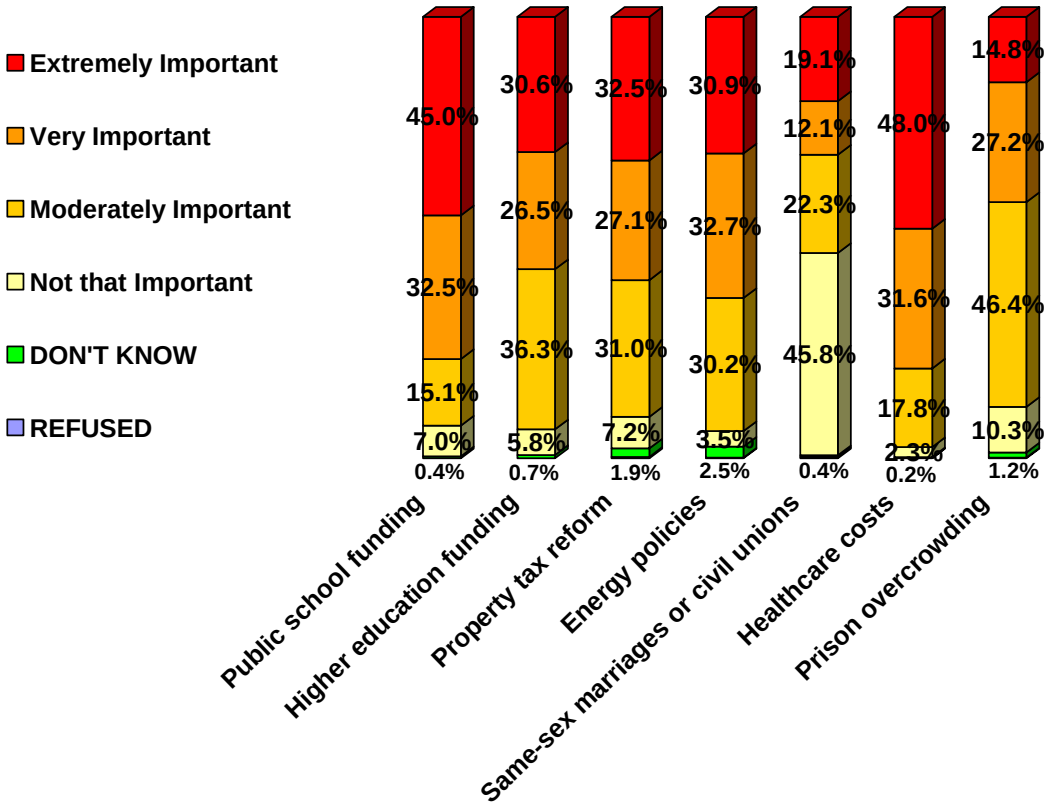
N=534

Roughly one-third of respondents (30.9%) estimated that nursing home costs in Idaho are somewhere between $2,000 and $3,000 per month.

- However, as many as 23.4% of respondents estimate the cost to be somewhere between $1,000 and $2,000 per month, 19.9% estimated the cost to be somewhere between $3,000 and $4,000 per month, and another 16.2% estimated the cost to be more than $4,000 per month.

Miscellaneous Policy

How important is it that the governor and the legislature deal with each of the following issues in the next year?



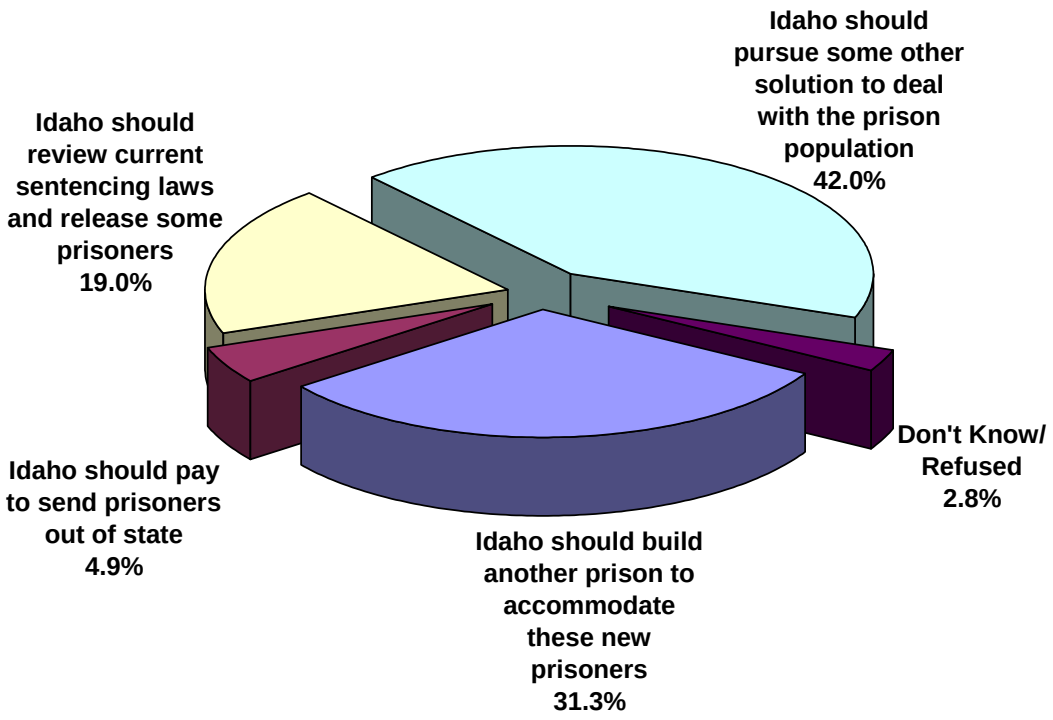
N=534[††]

Healthcare costs and public school funding were seen as the most important issues that the governor and the legislature should deal with in the second session of the 58th Idaho Legislature, with 48.0% and 45.0% of respondents indicating these two issues were extremely important respectively.

- Same-sex marriages or civil unions were *not* high on the list of priorities among Idahoans, with 45.8% of respondents saying the issue is not that important.
- In Region 1, 42.5% of respondents indicated that it was extremely important that the governor and the legislature deal with property tax reform.
- 28.6% of Republicans thought that it was extremely important that the governor and the legislature deal with same-sex marriage or civil unions compared to 7.0% of Democrats and 13.4% of Independents.

[††] Numerical value labels for "REFUSED" were omitted in this figure.

The Idaho prison population is at an all-time high. Do you believe that…?

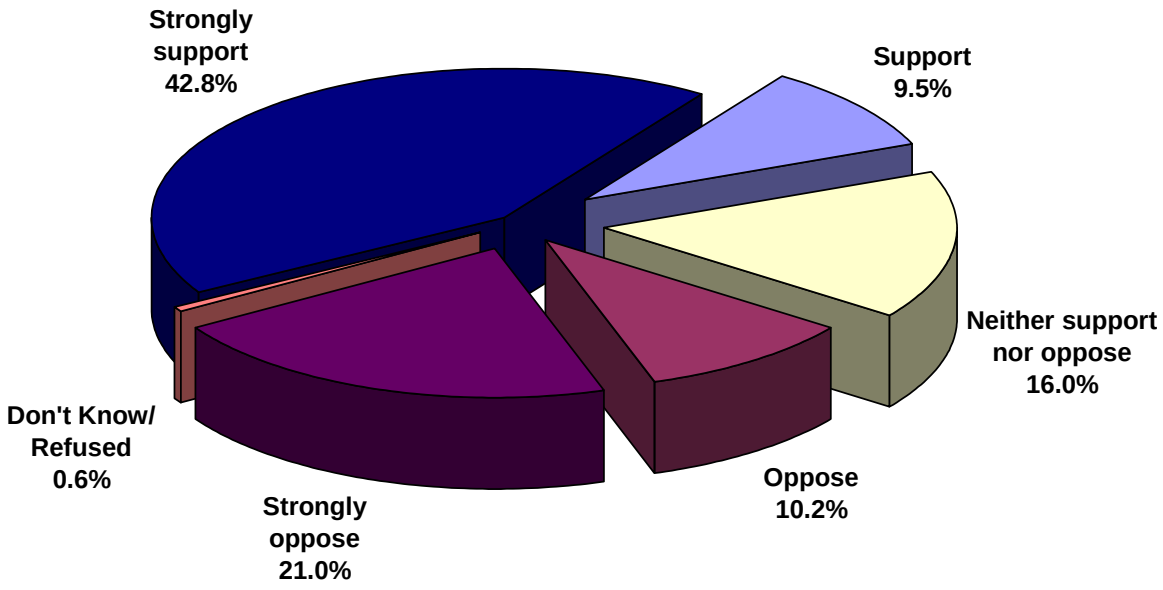


N=534

When respondents were asked if the state should build another prison, send prisoners out of state, or review current sentencing laws to deal with prison overcrowding, 42.0% said Idaho should pursue some other solution.

- Almost one-third (31.3%) of respondents believed Idaho should build another prison to deal with overcrowding.
- Only 4.9% of respondents thought the state should pay to send prisoners out of state.

How strongly do you support a constitutional amendment to the Idaho Constitution to ban same-sex marriages?

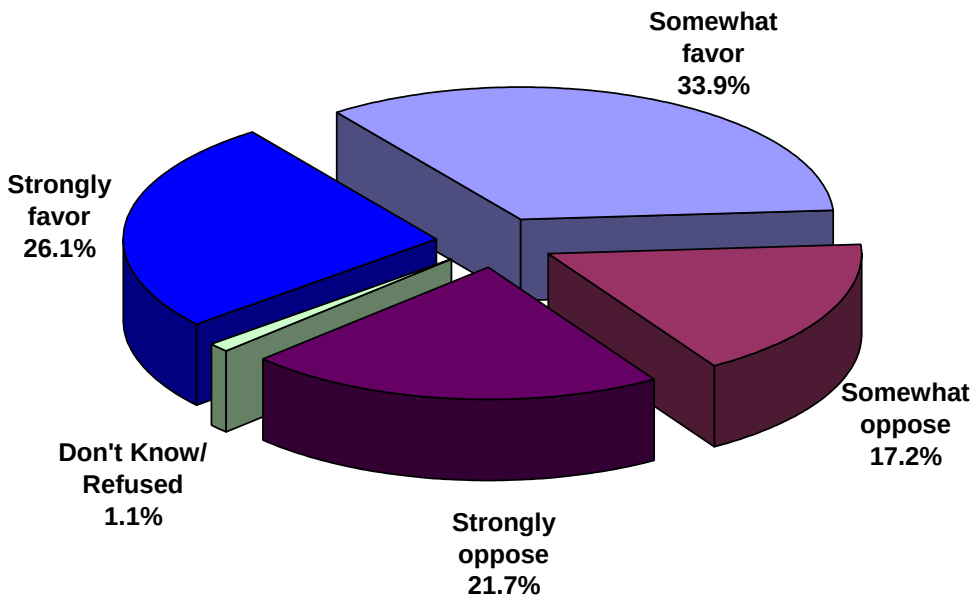


N=534

Although most Idahoans did not necessarily think it was important for the governor or the legislature to deal with same-sex marriages or civil unions (see page 22), 52.3% of respondents said they would strongly support or support an amendment to the Idaho Constitution to ban same-sex marriages.

- In Region 6, 66.9% of respondents strongly support an amendment to the Idaho Constitution to ban same-sex marriages and another 12.7% support an amendment.
- Comparatively, in Region 3, only 32.9% of respondents strongly support an amendment and another 11.0% support an amendment.
- 59.6% of Republicans strongly support an amendment to the Idaho Constitution to ban same-sex marriages, compared to 30.7% of Independents and 18.1% of Democrats.

How do you feel about citizens armies like the Idaho National Guard being used to fight an overseas war like the war in Iraq?

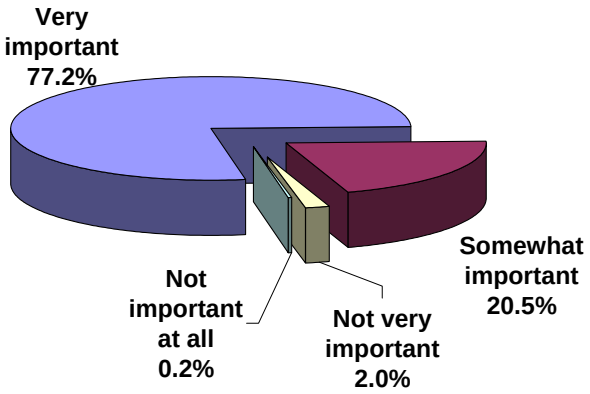


N=534

About 60.0% of respondents strongly favor or somewhat favor the fact that members of citizen armies such as the Idaho National Guard are being used to fight overseas wars like the war in Iraq.

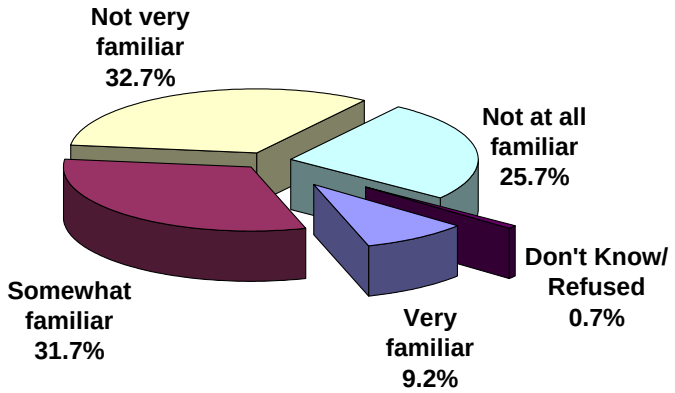
- However, 38.9% of respondents were strongly opposed or somewhat opposed to the fact that members of citizen armies such as the Idaho National Guard are being used to fight overseas wars.
- About 83.2% of Republicans strongly favor or somewhat favor, compared to 50.3% of Independents, and 29.8% of Democrats.

Overall, how important are libraries in our state?



N=534

How familiar are you with the Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI) databases?

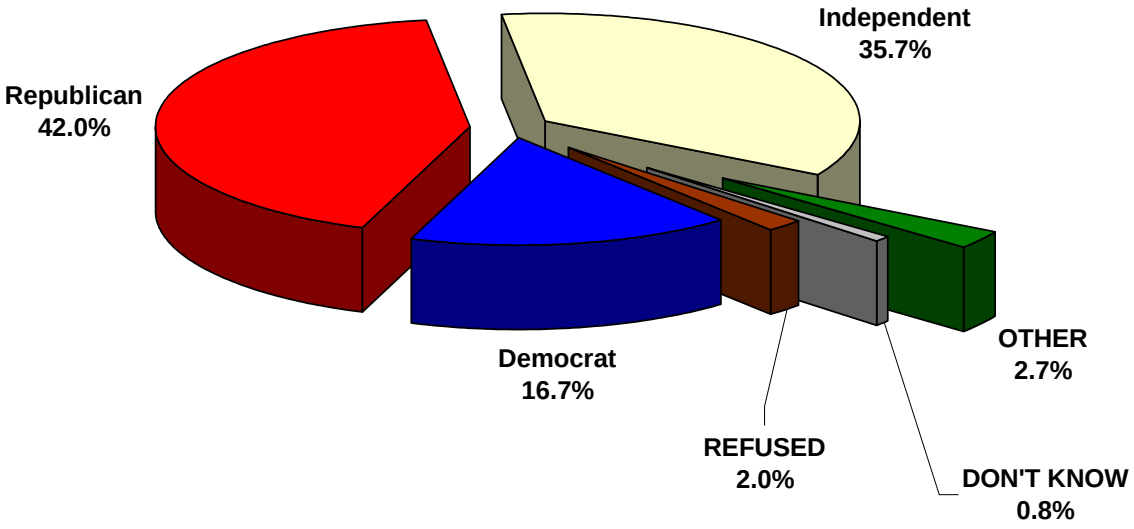


N=534

- Respondents showed strong support for libraries with 77.2% of respondents indicating that they think libraries are very important.
- However, familiarity with the Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI) databases is minimal, with only 9.2% of respondents indicating they are very familiar with the LiLI database and only an additional 31.7% of respondents indicating they are somewhat familiar with the LiLI databases.

Demographics[!]

Do you consider yourself to be a…?



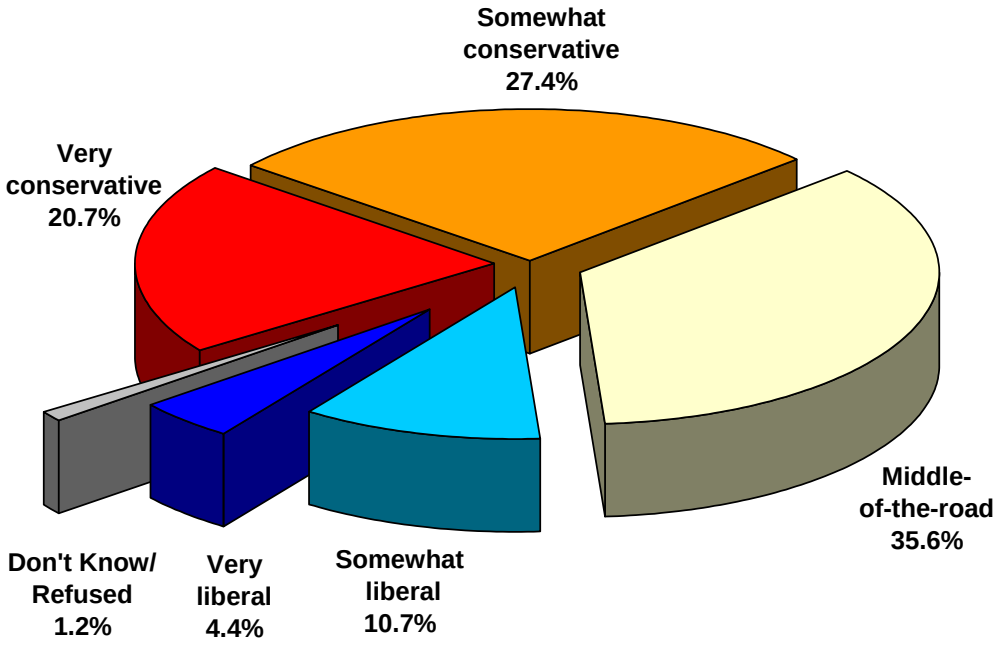
N=534

While the majority of respondents (42.0%) identified themselves as Republicans, this percentage has dropped from 47% last year.

- The percentage of respondents identifying themselves as Democrats declined from 18% last year to 16.7% this year.
- *The percentage of respondents identifying themselves as Independents increased from 29% last year to 35.7% this year.*
- Region 6 had the largest percentage of respondents identifying themselves as Republicans at 47.9%, however, Region 3 and Region 5 were close contenders with 47.6% and 44.7% respectively.
- The highest percentages of Democrats occurred in Regions 1, 2, and 4, where 22.7%, 22.0%, and 20.7% of respondents identified themselves as Democrats, respectively.
- In Region 4, 40.4% pf respondents identified themselves as Independents, followed by 37.4% in Region 5.

[!] With the exception of political party affiliation and political ideology (the first two figures presented in the Demographics section), all demographic results are *not weighted*.

In general, would you describe yourself as…?



N=534

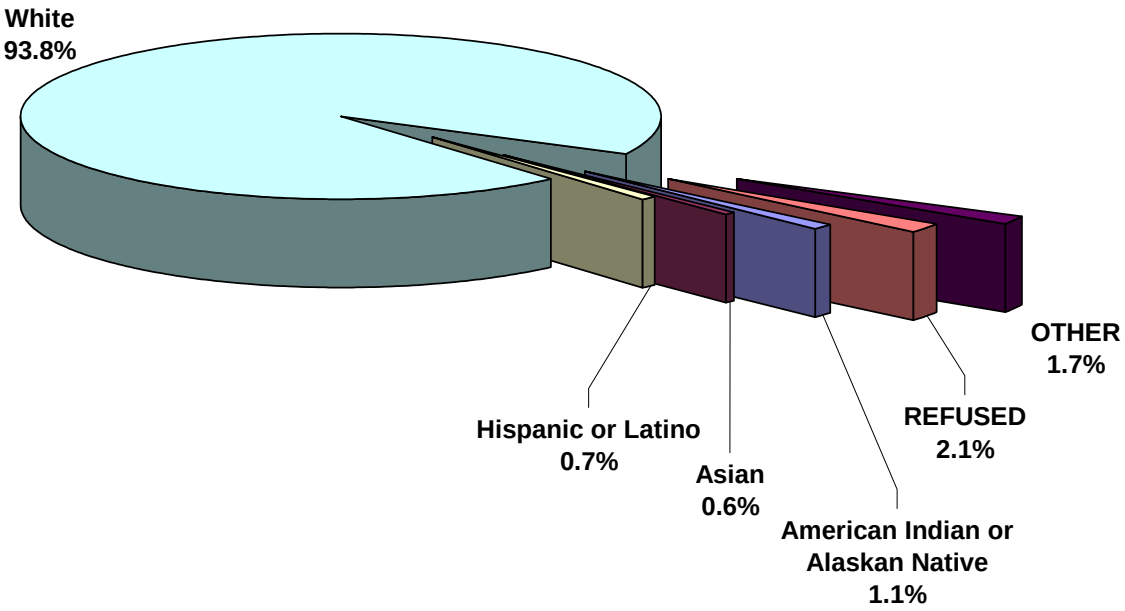
The percentage of respondents identifying themselves as very conservative increased from 16% last year to 20.7% this year, while those identifying themselves as somewhat conservative decreased from 36% last year to 27.4% this year.

- Those identifying themselves as middle-of-the-road increased from 33% last year to 35.6% this year.
- The percentage of respondents identifying themselves as somewhat liberal or very liberal changed little compared to the previous year.
- Region 6 remains the most conservative region in the state with 22.4% of respondents indicating they are very conservative and 40.9% indicating they are somewhat conservative.
- Region 2 is the most liberal part of the state where 16.1% of respondents indicated they are somewhat liberal and 5.7% indicated they are very liberal.

Sex of Respondents:

Male	43.3%
Female	56.7%
N=534	

Racial or ethnic groups that best describe respondents:



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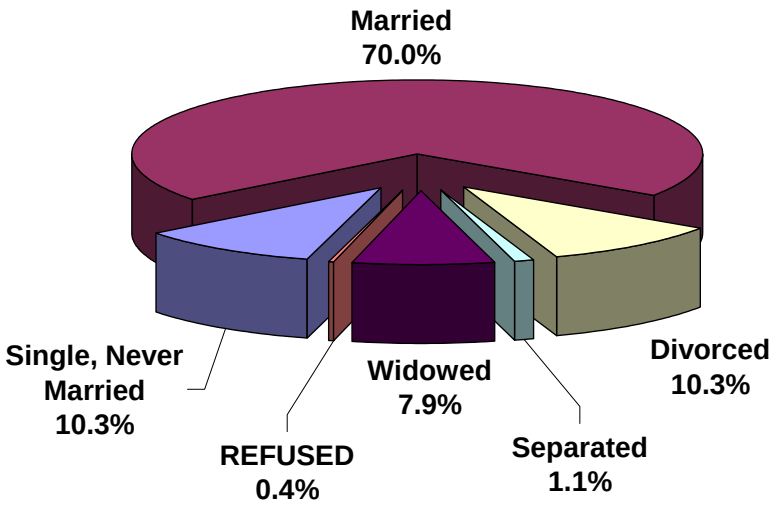
Marital status of respondents:



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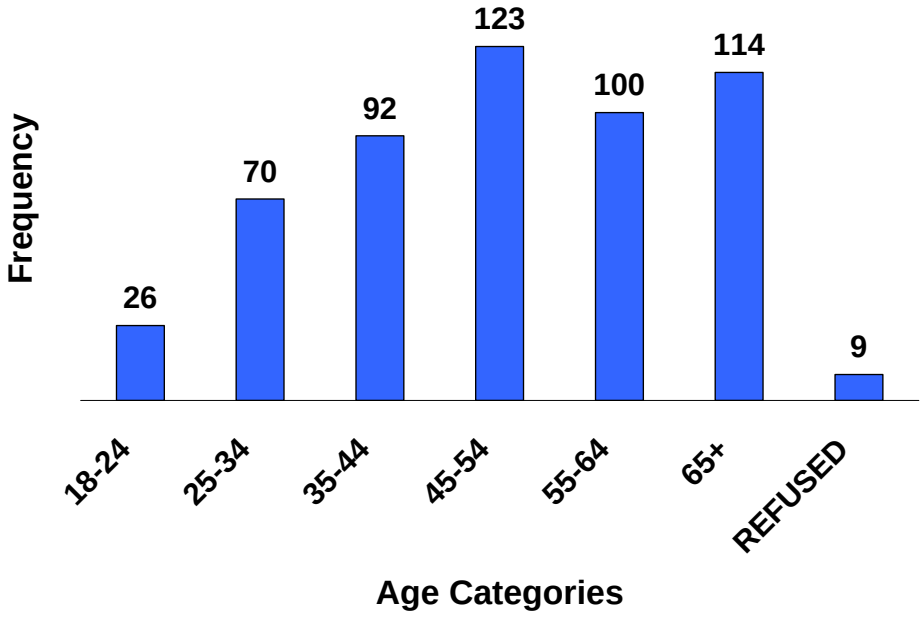
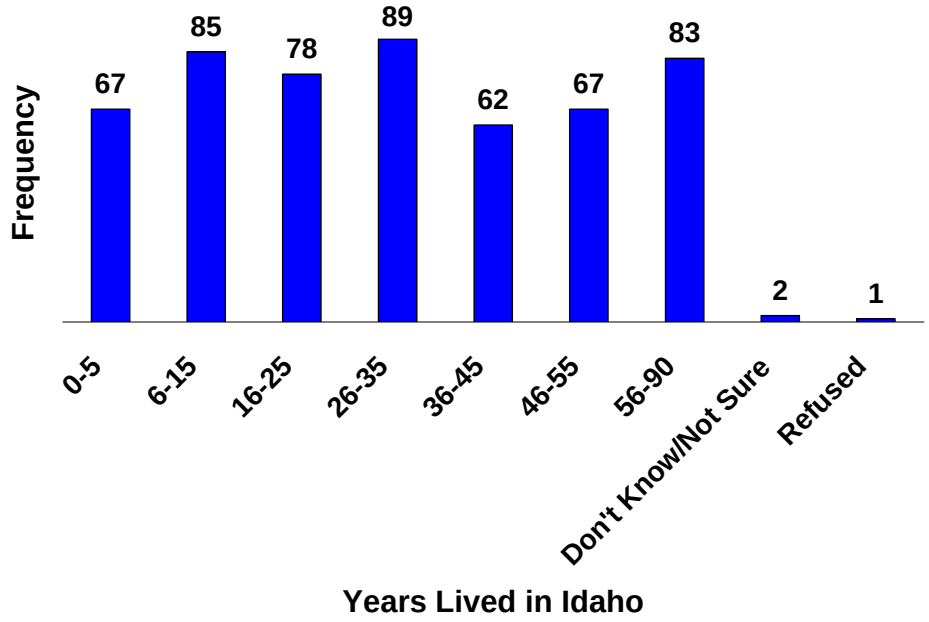
Age of respondents:



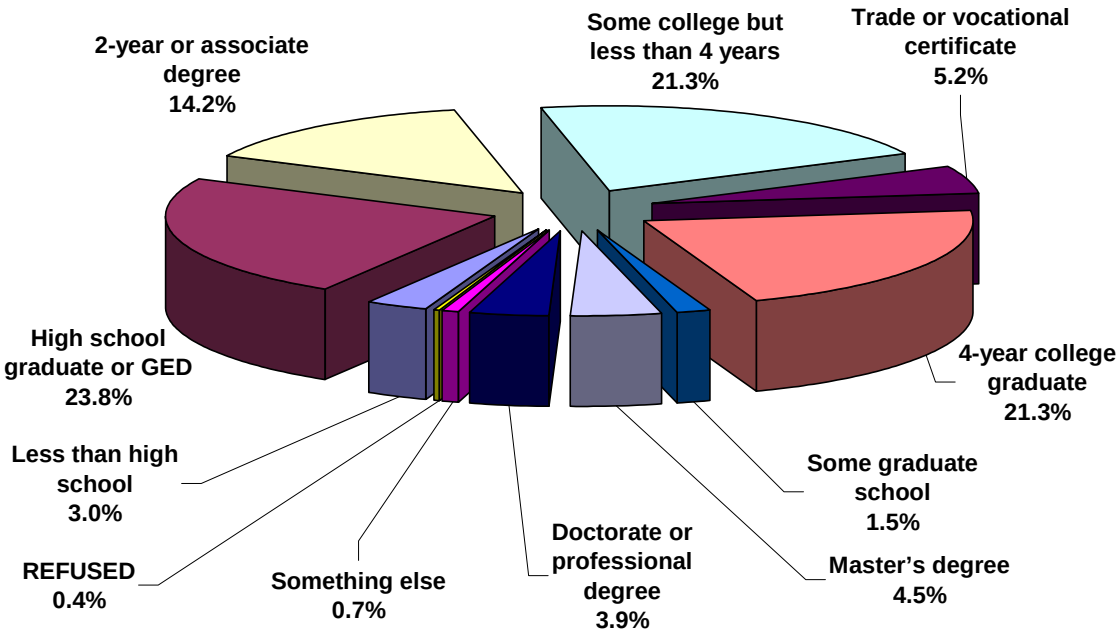
N=534

Number of years that respondents have lived in Idaho:



N=534

Education levels of respondents:



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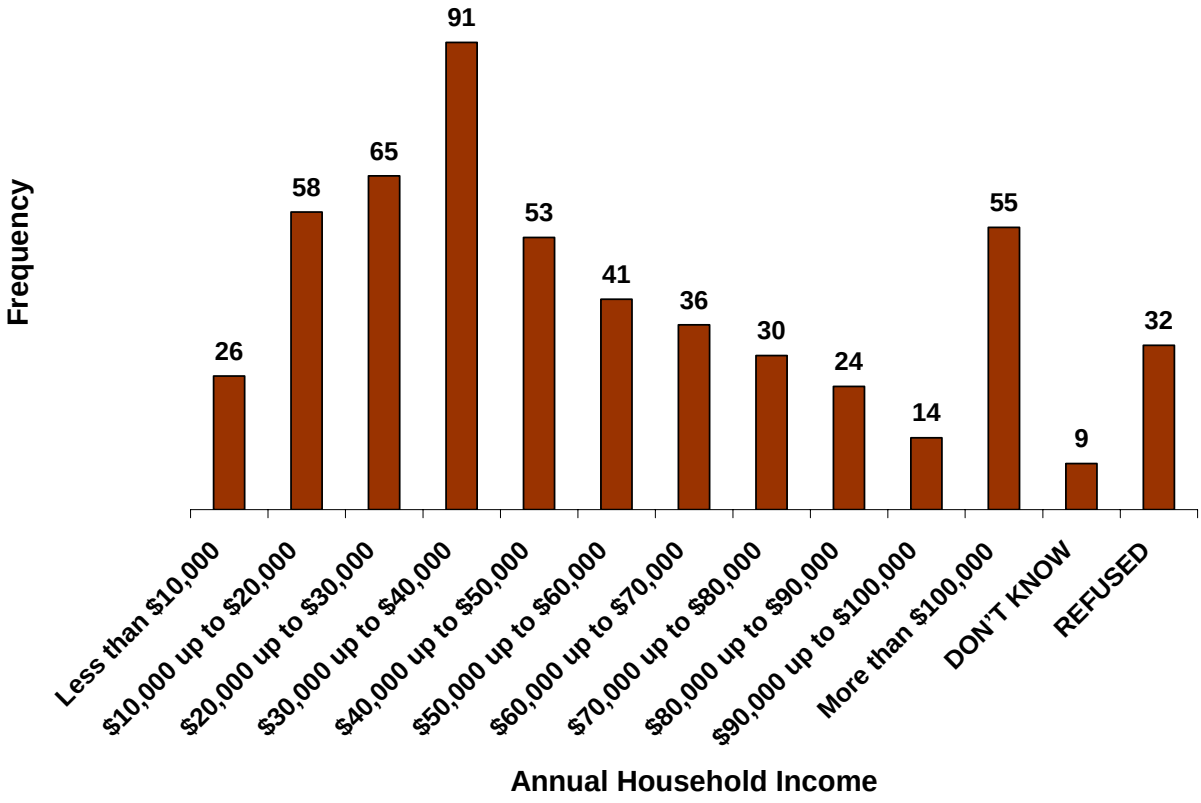
Annual household income of respondents:



N=534