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## **Attitudes on Political Reform in Ohio**

### **Highlights from a statewide survey**

#### **June 2008**

In the 2008 Midwest Political Reform Survey, large majorities of Ohioans continue to distrust their state government. At the same time, many continue to hold on to an abiding faith in the ability to change state government to be less influenced by moneyed interests and more responsive and accountable to constituents. A large majority (77%) expresses personal interest in an organization that works toward making state government work better by being more honest and accountable, and over half of Ohio residents (57%) are extremely interested.

The 2008 Belden Russonello & Stewart survey for the Midwest Democracy Network ([www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org](http://www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org)) is a random sample telephone survey of adults in five Midwestern states (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin) on attitudes toward government and political reform. A total of 2,004 interviews were conducted by telephone April 21 through May 4, 2008. This report focuses on the results for the state of Ohio. In Ohio 402 interviews were conducted. The margin of sampling error for the Ohio survey is plus or minus 4.9 percentage points at the 95% level of tolerance. Many of the questions in the current survey track attitudes from the BRS-MDN survey on political reform conducted in 2006. The survey was funded by the Joyce Foundation ([www.joycefdn.org](http://www.joycefdn.org)).

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## Overview

The 2008 survey uncovers five main points on Ohioans' attitudes toward state government and reforms:

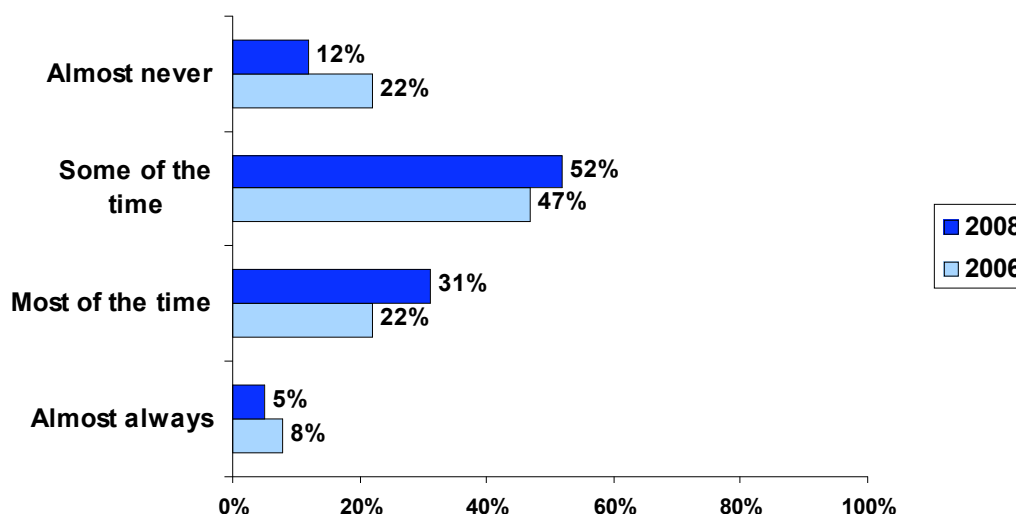
1. Six in ten Ohio residents say they only trust state government "some of the time" or "almost never," and concern about the influence of money in state politics remains on par with concern about state taxes, but behind gas prices, jobs, the economy, healthcare, and public schools.
2. Even with their distrust in state government, many Ohioans have not lost hope. Majorities believe it is "worth getting money out of politics" and reject the idea that corruption will always be present in state government.
3. Strong support exists for a range of reform efforts. Large majorities of nearly eight in ten or more Ohio residents believe each of the reforms tested in the survey will make a difference in helping state government work better.
4. Personal interest in government reform issues is high among residents of Ohio. Three-quarters of Ohioans (77%) express high interest in an organization that focuses on getting their state government to work better. Six in ten (62%) are also more interested in a political candidate who believes it may not be possible to improve education, create jobs, and cut taxes without first reducing the role of money in politics and the influence of lobbyists, than in a candidate who focuses solely on the issues (35%).
5. As we found in 2006, the top goals for state government to aspire to according to Ohioans are honesty, accountability, and responsiveness.

## Findings

### 1. Little trust in government; concern about the influence of money in politics

Residents of Ohio lack trust in their state government. A majority of residents (64%, overall) trust government to do what is right “only some of the time” (52%) or “almost never” (12%). Fewer than one third (31%) trust government “most of the time” and only five percent “almost always” trust state government to do what is right. While distrust of state government in Ohio is still high, Ohioans have become more trusting over the last two years. In 2006, 22% of Ohio residents said they “almost never” trusted state government to do what is right. Part of this slight decline in distrust can be attributed to less frustration with the governor. Compared to Governor Taft’s low approval rating in 2006, Governor Strickland garners the approval of a larger percentage of Ohioans with three in ten (29%) saying the governor is doing a “good” job and over half (53%) saying he is doing a fair job. Just 16% believe the governor is doing a “poor” job. In 2006, Governor Taft’s numbers were 11% good; 31% fair; and 54% poor.

#### Trust in Government to Do What is Right



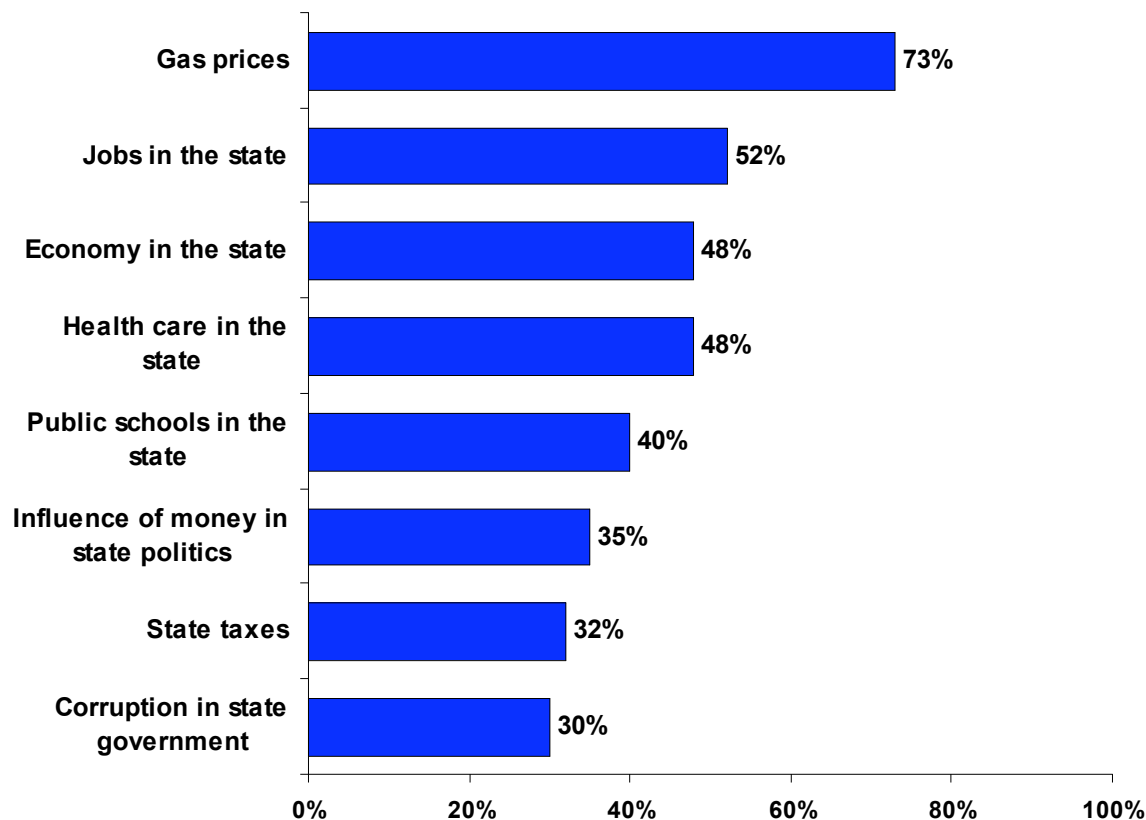
Q5. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in [STATE] to do what is right: almost always, most of the time, only some of the time, or almost never?

*Midwest Democracy Network Survey conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart, n=402 residents of Ohio, April 21 – May 4, 2008*

For Ohio residents, “the influence of money in state politics” continues to be a concern; over one third (35%) say they are “extremely” concerned about money in politics. This puts it in the same range as state taxes (32%), but below issues like gas prices (73%), jobs (52%), the economy (48%), health care (48%) and public schools (40%).

### Concerns with State Issues

% saying “10”



On a scale of one to ten where ten means extremely concerned and one means not concerned at all, how concerned are you personally about each of the following issues in your state:

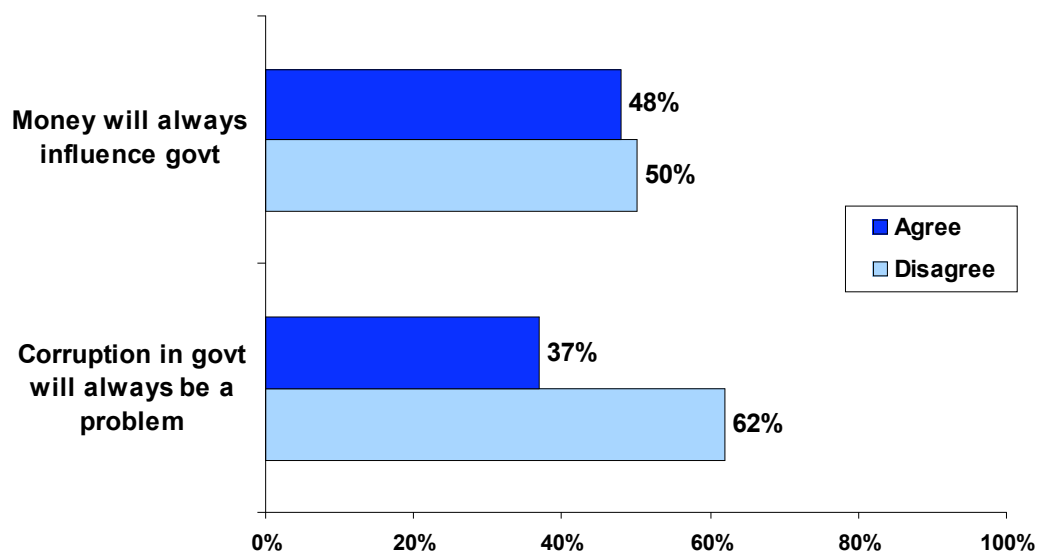
- Q12. Gas prices
- Q9. State taxes
- Q6. The economy in [STATE]
- Q11. The influence of money in state politics
- Q13. Jobs in [STATE]
- Q7. Health care in [STATE]
- Q10. Public schools in [STATE]
- Q8. Corruption in state government

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## 2. Majority refuses to give up on improving government

Many Ohioans have not lost hope for change in state government, although skepticism remains high for some. Half of Ohioans (50%) disagree that “money will always influence government decisions, so it is not worth trying to reduce the amount of money in politics,” while 48% agree. More than six in ten (62%) reject the idea that “corruption in government will always be a problem, so trying to fix it will not make much difference,” while 37% agree.

### Money and Corruption in Government



Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Is that strongly or somewhat [agree/disagree]? Q34. Corruption in government will always be a problem so trying to fix it will not make much difference Q35. Money will always influence government decisions, so it is not worth trying to reduce the amount of money in politics.

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### 3. Strong support for many reforms

All of the specific reforms tested in the survey garner majorities favoring the policies. Nearly six in ten or more Ohioans believe the top reforms will make a “big difference” in how their state government works. These reforms involve conflict of interest issues with judges and officials who award contracts and reforms related to openness, including public reporting for lobbyists:

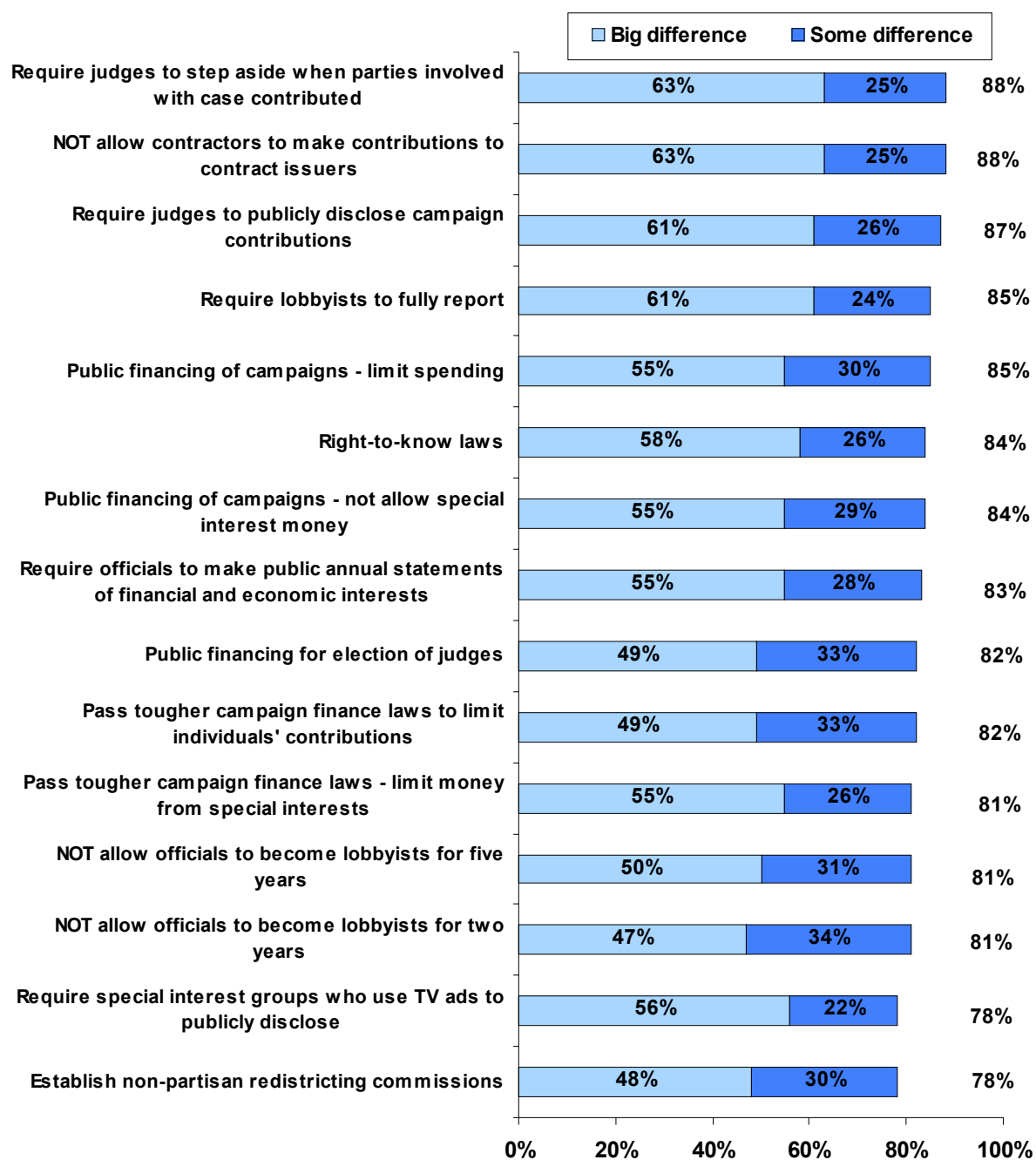
- “Require judges to step aside in cases in which either the lawyers or the parties involved in the case have contributed to their election campaigns” (88% make a difference; 63% “big difference”)
- “Not allow state contractors to make political contributions to elected officials who issue contracts” (88% make a difference; 63% “big difference”)
- “Require judges to publicly disclose any campaign contributions they received from individuals or groups who appear before them in court” (87% make a difference; 61% would make a “big difference”)
- “Require lobbyists to fully report their clients, what issues they are working on, and the money they spend on lobbying lawmakers” (85% make a difference; 61% “big difference”)
- “Public financing of campaigns which would use tax dollars to give candidates the same amount of money to run their campaigns and limit spending by each candidate” (85% make a difference; 55% “big difference”)
- “Right-to-know laws that give the public more access to state government decisions on spending and programs” (84% make a difference; 58% “big difference”)
- “Public financing of campaigns which would use tax dollars to give candidates the same amount of money to run their campaigns and not allow them to take money from special interests” (84% make a difference; 55% “big difference”)
- “Require top state officials to file and make public annual statements of their financial and economic interests” (83% make a difference; 55% “big difference”)
- “Public financing for election of judges – that is letting judges use tax dollars to finance their campaigns rather than asking for contributions

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from lawyers and special interest groups” (82% make a difference; 49% “big difference”)

- “Pass tougher campaign finance laws that limit the amount of money individuals can give to political candidates” (82% make a difference; 49% “big difference”)
- “Pass tougher campaign finance laws to limit the amount of money special interest groups can give to candidates and political parties” (81% make a difference; 55% “big difference”)
- “Not allow top state government officials to become lobbyists for five years after leaving state government” (81% make a difference; 50% “big difference”)
- “Not allow top state government officials to become lobbyists for two years after leaving state government” (81% make a difference; 47% “big difference”)
- “Require special interest groups that use paid TV ads during elections to publicly disclose where their money comes from” (78% make a difference; 56% “big difference”)
- “Instead of allowing politicians to be in charge of redrawing their own district lines every ten years, establish independent, non-partisan commissions to draw district lines” (78% make a difference; 48% “big difference”)

## Proposals to Make Government Work Better



Thinking again about state government, please tell me whether each of the following would make a big difference, some difference, not much difference, or no difference at all in making government work better.

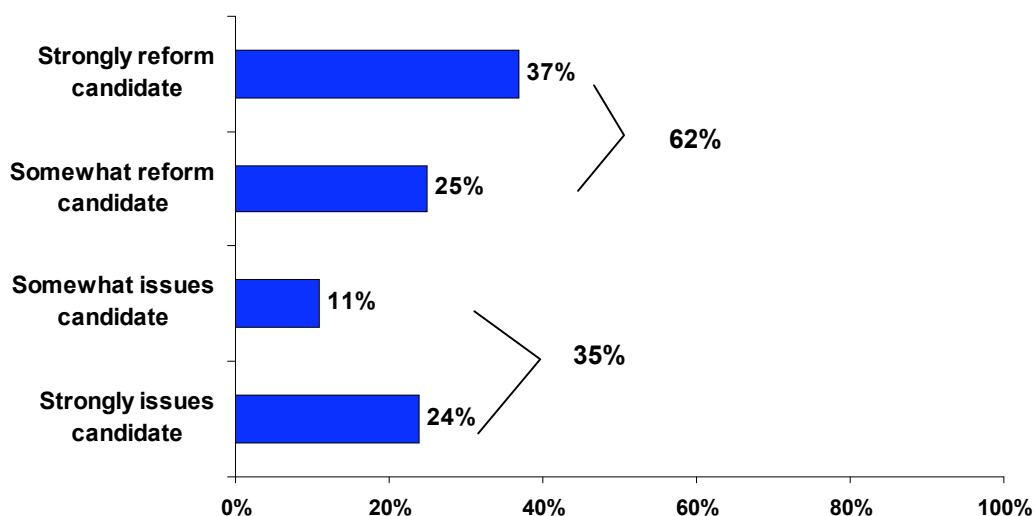
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#### 4. Personal interest in government reform issues is high among Ohioans

A large majority of Ohioans expresses interest in an organization that “works toward making state government work better by being more honest, accountable, and responsive” (77%, “8,” “9,” “10” on a ten-point scale), and over half (57%) say that they are “very interested” (“10”).

A majority of Ohio residents (62%) would also prefer a candidate that believes political reform is necessary to make progress on issue priorities (37% “very likely”) over a candidate that focuses solely on the issues (35%).

#### Support for Reform-focused Candidate versus Issues-based Candidate



Q43. Which candidate would you be more likely to support? The candidate who will focus on improving education, creating jobs, and cutting taxes, OR The candidate who wants to improve education, create jobs and cut taxes but believes it may not be possible without first reducing the role of money in politics and the influence of lobbyists. Strongly or Somewhat?

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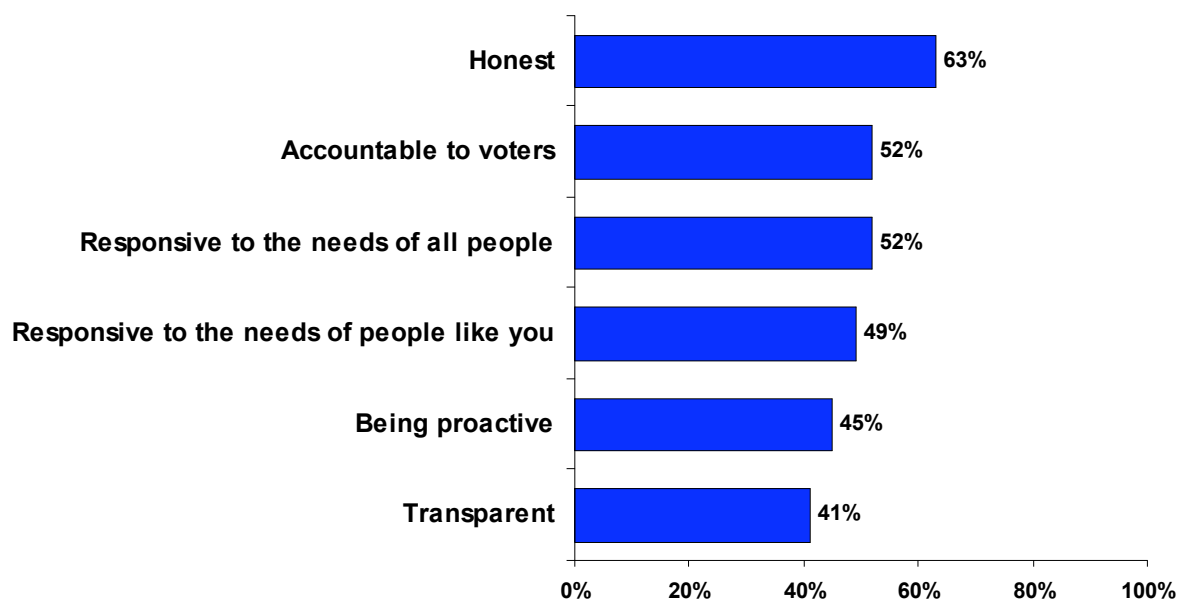
## 5. Striving for a more honest and accountable government

Honesty is the most important value Ohio residents have for their state government, followed by accountability and responsiveness. Six in ten (63%) residents of Ohio say “honesty” is an “extremely” important characteristic for state government.

“Accountable to voters” (52% say “extremely” important) and “responsive to the needs of all people” (52%) make up a second tier of characteristics Ohio residents desire in their state government.

### Important Characteristics in State Government

% saying “10”



Thinking about state government, please tell me how important each of the following characteristics is on a scale of one to ten, where one means not at all important and ten means extremely important.

Q16. Honest

Q17. Accountable to voters

Q15. Responsive to the needs of all people

Q14. Responsive to the needs of people like you

Q19. Being proactive in solving the state’s problems

Q18. Being transparent and open in how government decisions are made

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