

Akron Buckeye Poll: 2015 Ohio Ballot Issues

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Executive Summary

The 2015 Akron Buckeye Poll investigates public opinion among registered voters about three proposed constitutional amendments on the 2015 general election ballot: Issue 1 (redistricting reform), Issue 2 (anti-monopoly provision), and Issue 3 (legalize marijuana). The survey provides a baseline for understanding public support for the ballot issues during the final weeks of the campaign.

Key findings:

- Registered voters report low levels of information on Issues 1 (redistricting) and 2 (monopoly), but high levels of information on Issue 3 (marijuana).
- Overall, a majority of registered voters are supportive of Issue 1 (redistricting), 55 to 16 percent with the 29 percent undecided.
- Overall, pluralities of registered voters are supportive of Issue 2 (monopoly), 40 to 28 percent with 32 percent undecided.
- Overall, registered voters are evenly divided on Issue 3 (marijuana), 46 to 46 percent with 8 percent undecided.
- Nearly two-fifths of registered voters see Issue 3 (marijuana) as the most important measure on the 2015 ballot, followed by one-third who see local tax levies as the most important.
- Registered voters report receiving more positive information about Issue 3 (marijuana) than for Issue 1 (redistricting) or Issue 2 (monopoly).
- Turnout will be critical in determining how support for the ballot issues is converted into votes by Election Day.

The Survey

The 2015 Akron Buckeye Poll was conducted by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research for the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron. It was a random sample of 1,074 Ohio registered voters conducted by telephone (with a cell phone component) between September 1 and October 1, 2015, with a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

The poll described the three proposed constitutional amendments as follow:

1. Redistricting Reform: *“One proposed amendment, **State Issue 1**, would change the way state legislative districts are drawn every ten years by creating a bipartisan redistricting commission.”*

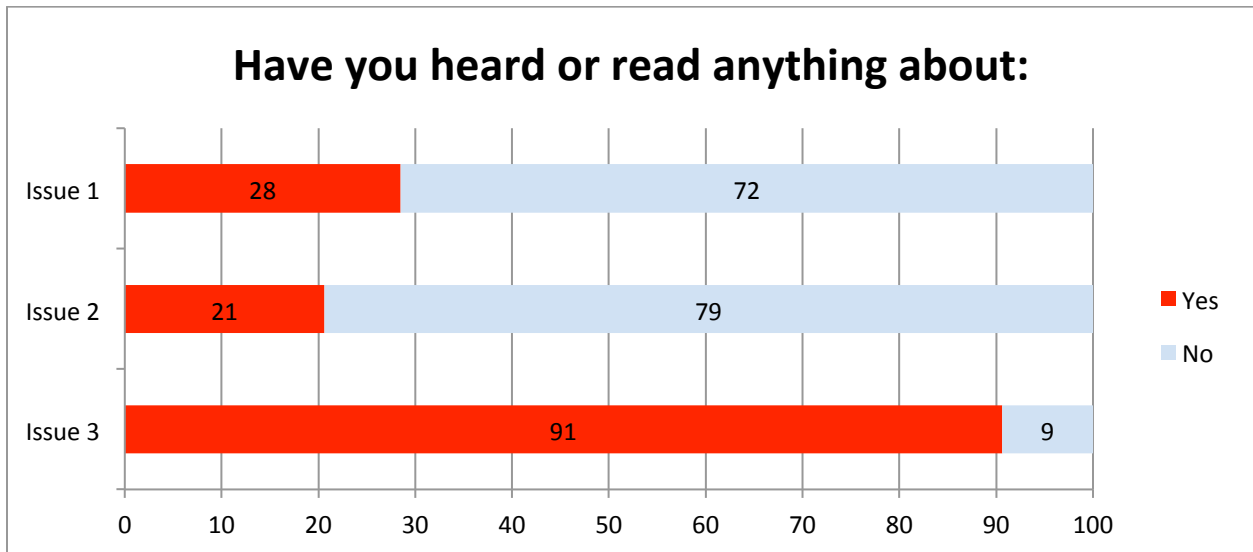
2. Anti-Monopoly Provision: “Another proposed amendment, **State Issue 2**, would prohibit any person or group from using the Ohio constitution to obtain an exclusive financial benefit, such as a monopoly or special tax rate.”

3. Legalize Marijuana: “A third proposed amendment, **State Issue 3**, would legalize marijuana in Ohio by creating a state marijuana control commission and recognizing selected marijuana growers in the state.”

Survey Results

Information on the Ballot Issues

Overall, there is substantial variation in the percentage of Ohio registered voters who report hearing or reading anything about the ballot issues. These respondents can be described as “minimally informed.”



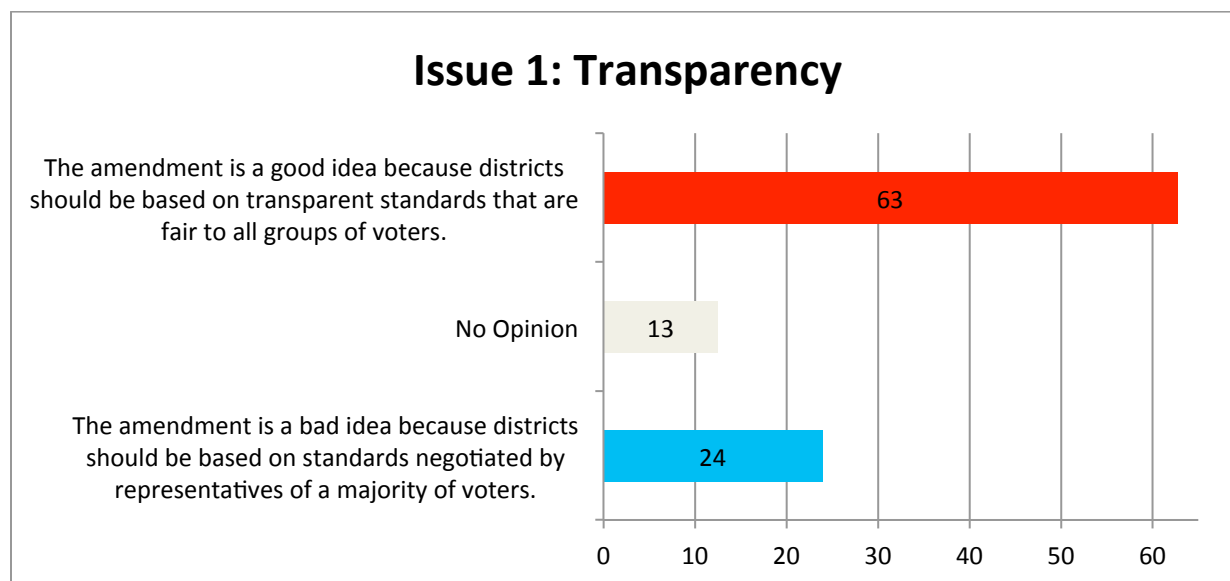
For Issue 1 (redistricting) less than one-third (29 percent) reported hearing or reading anything about the proposed amendment. For Issue 2 (monopoly) the comparable figure was about one-fifth (21 percent). Such low levels of information are common for ballot issues pertaining to the mechanics of government.

However, nine in ten respondents (91 percent) report hearing or reading anything about Issue 3 (marijuana). This high level of reported information may reflect the controversial nature of social issues, but also the national debate over the legalization of marijuana.

Arguments for and against the Ballot Issues*

Issue 1: Four arguments concerning Issue 1 (redistricting) were presented to all respondents. On each of these arguments—transparency, competition, compactness, and bipartisanship—a large majority of Ohio registered voters supported Issue 1.

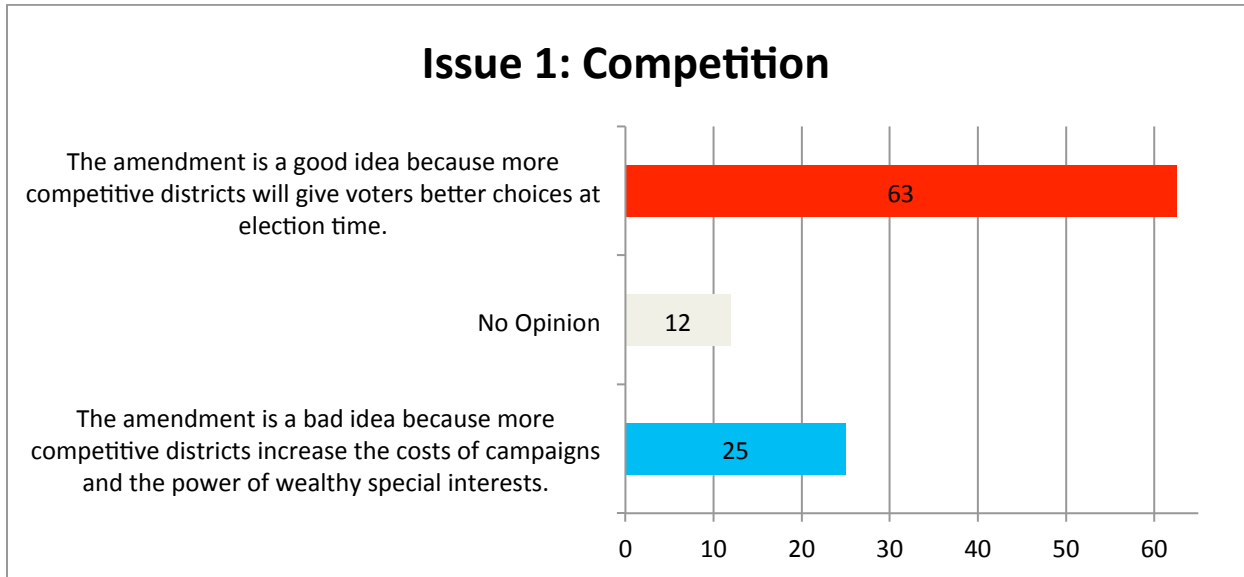
1. Transparency in redistricting



More than three-fifths of registered voters say that Issue 1 is a “good idea” because redistricting should be based on transparent and fair standards. At the same time, about one-quarter (24 percent) of respondents say that Issue 1 is a “bad idea” because redistricting should be based on standards negotiated by representatives of a majority of voters. (The remaining 13 percent of respondents had no opinion.)

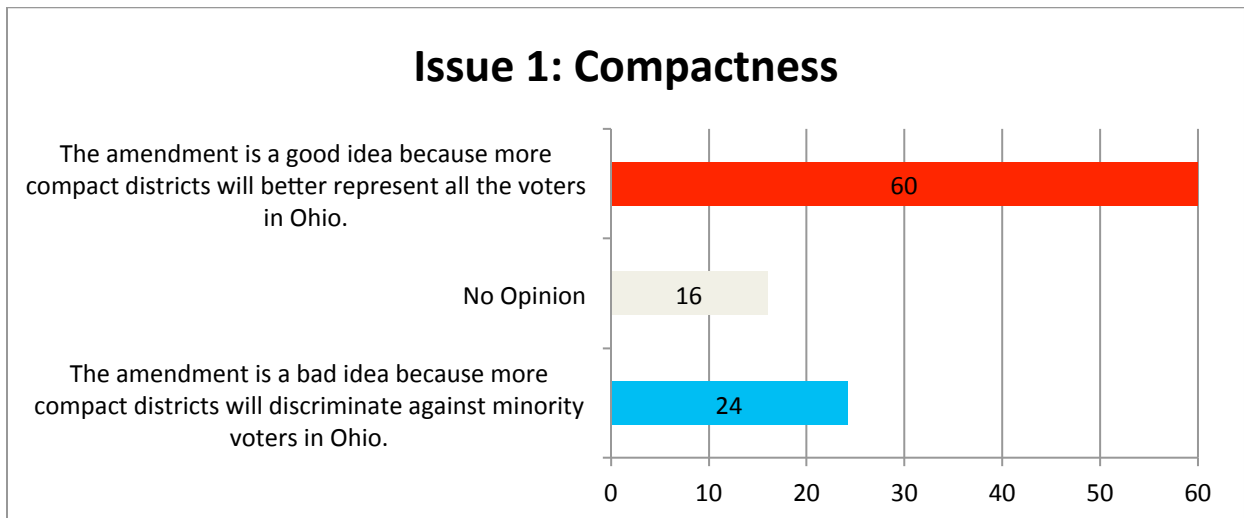
* All respondents were asked about the major arguments for or against the ballot issues. These questions were pairs of statements, one saying the ballot issue is a “good idea” and one saying it is a “bad idea.” For each question, the pairs of statements were rotated so that an equal number of respondents initially heard each statement first; in the figures that follow, the “good idea” response is listed first for consistency in presentation.

2. Competition in elections



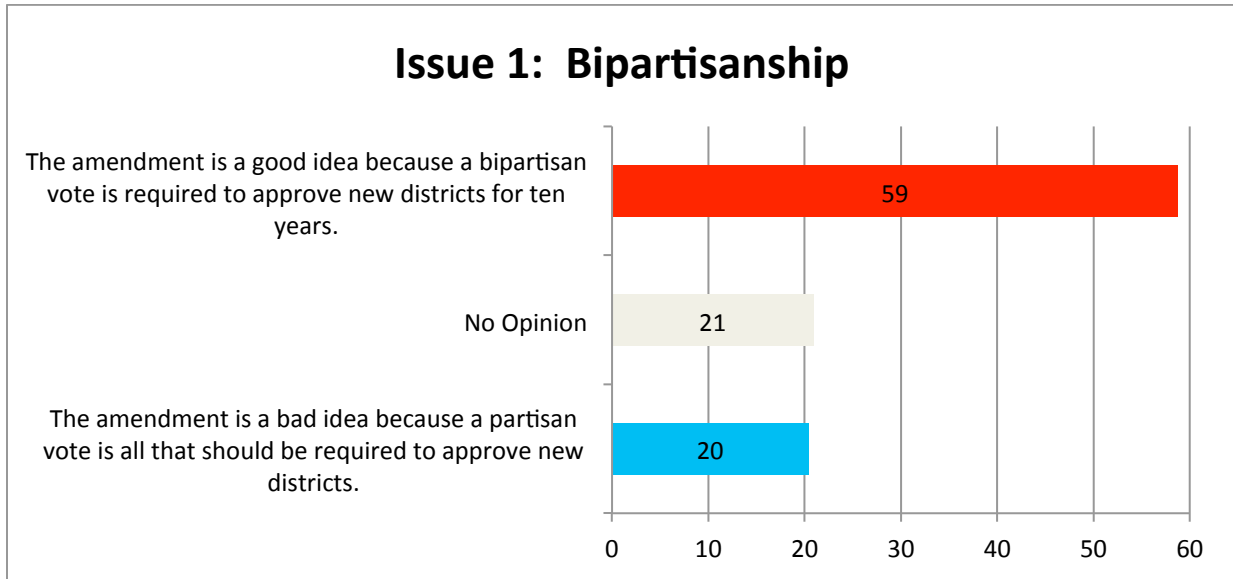
More than three-fifths (63 percent) of registered voters say Issue 1 was a “good idea” because more competitive elections give voters better choices. At the same time, one-quarter (25 percent) of respondents say that Issue 1 was a “bad idea” because more competitive elections would increase campaign costs and influence of special interests. (The remaining 12 percent of respondents have no opinion.)

3. Compactness of districts



More than three-fifths of respondents say that Issue 1 is a “good idea” because more compact districts would better represent all voters. At the same time, almost one-quarter (24 percent) of respondents say that Issue 1 was a “bad idea” because more compact districts would discriminate against minority voters. (The remaining 16 percent of respondents have no opinion.)

4. Bipartisanship in redistricting

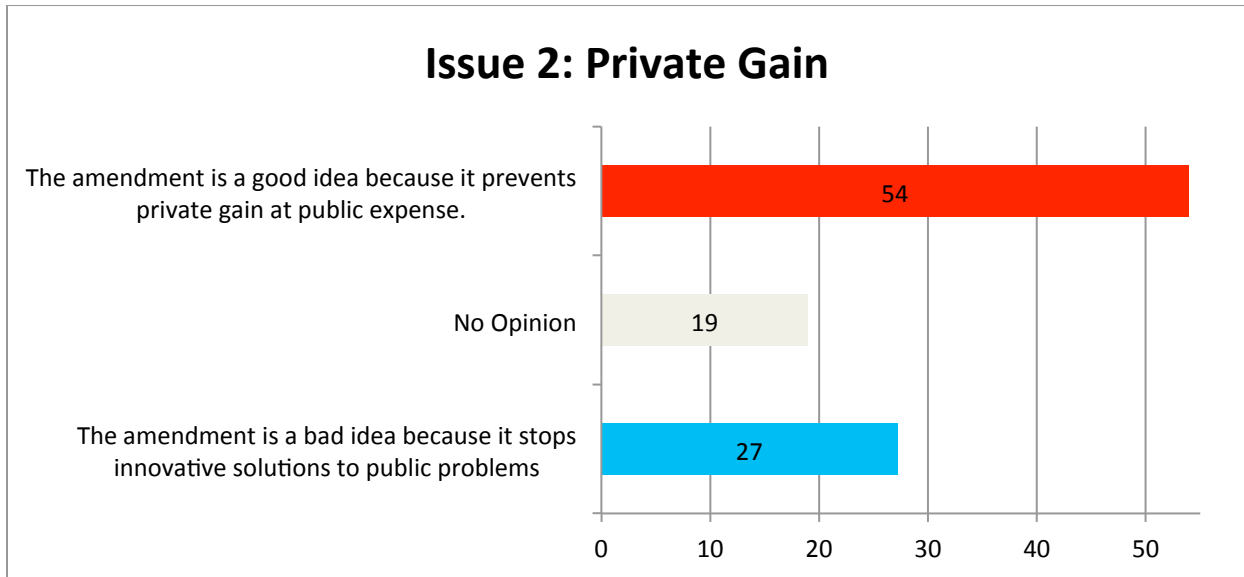


Almost three-fifths of registered voters say Issue 1 is a “good idea” because it requires a bipartisan vote to approve new districts every ten years. At the same time, one-fifth (20 percent) of respondents say that Issue 1 is a “bad idea” because a partisan vote is all that should be required to approve new districts. (The remaining 21 percent of respondents has no opinion.)

To the extent that voters turn out and cast their ballots on the basis of transparency, competitiveness, compactness and/or bipartisanship, Issue 1 is likely to pass.

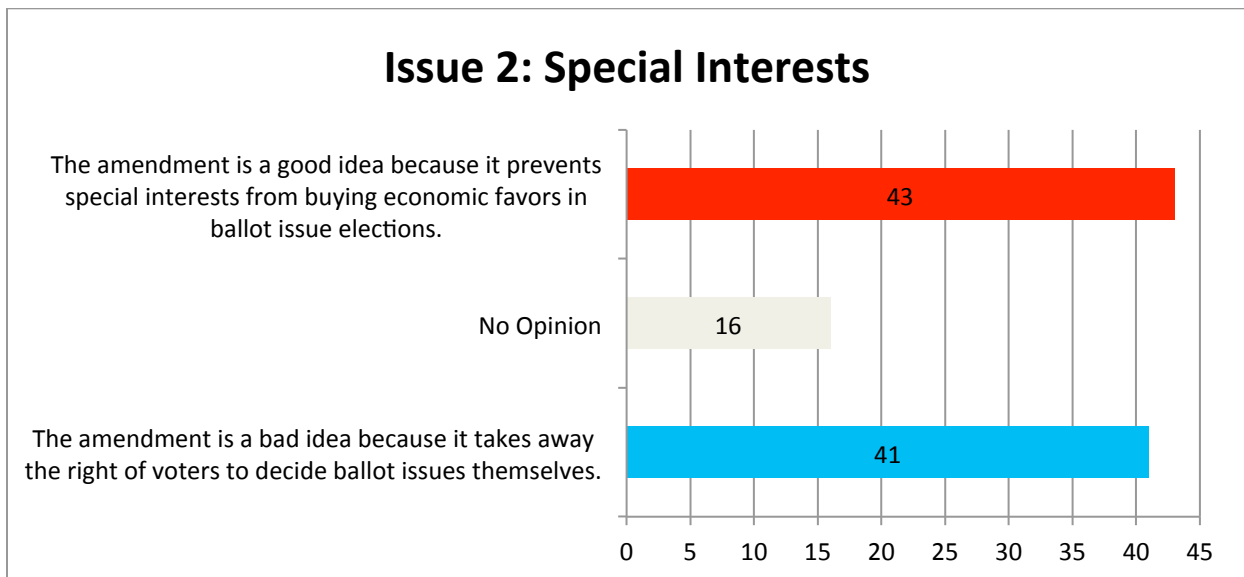
Issue 2: Two arguments concerning Issue 2 (monopoly) were presented to all respondents. On one argument, protecting the public interest, a majority of Ohio registered voters supported Issue 2. On the other argument, controlling special interests, respondents were evenly divided.

1. Preventing private gain



A majority of registered voters (54 percent) say Issue 2 is a “good idea” because it prevents private gain at public expense. At the same time, more than one-quarter (27 percent) of respondents say that Issue 2 is a “bad idea” because it stops innovative solutions to public problems. (The remaining 19 percent of respondents has no opinion.)

2. Controlling special interests

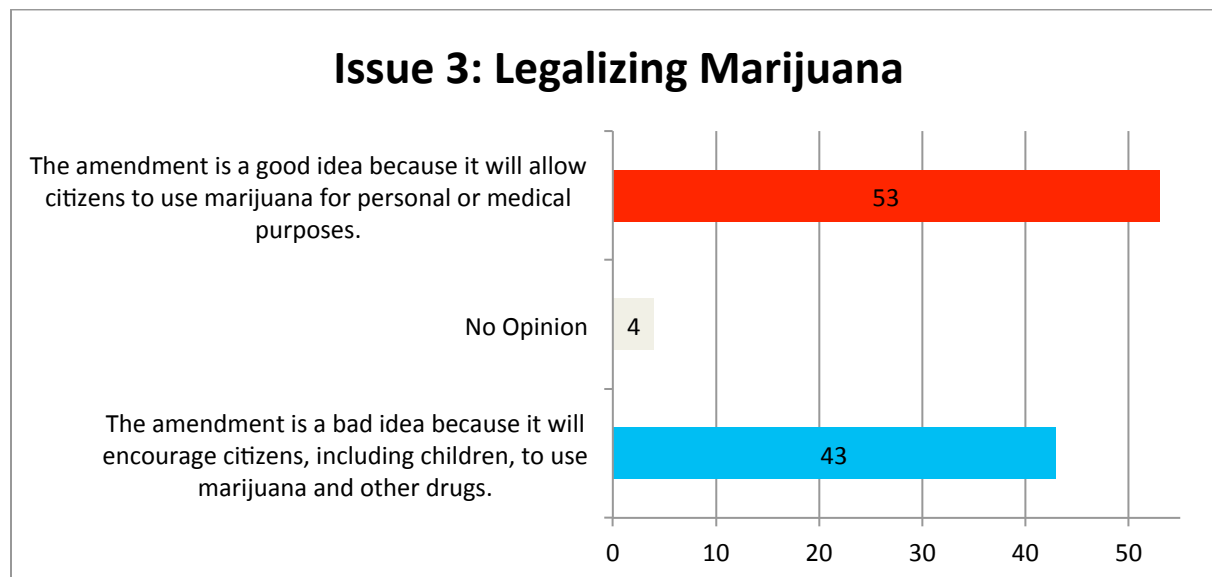


More than two-fifths of registered voters (43 percent) say Issue 2 is a “good idea” because it prevents special interests from buying economic favors at the ballot box. At the same time, about two-fifths (41 percent) say that Issue 2 is a “bad idea” because it takes away the right of voters to decide ballot issues themselves. (The remaining 16 percent of respondents has no opinion.)

To the extent that voters turn out and cast their ballots on the basis of preventing private gain, Issue 2 is likely to pass. However, ballots cast on the basis of controlling special interest may diminish the likelihood of passage.

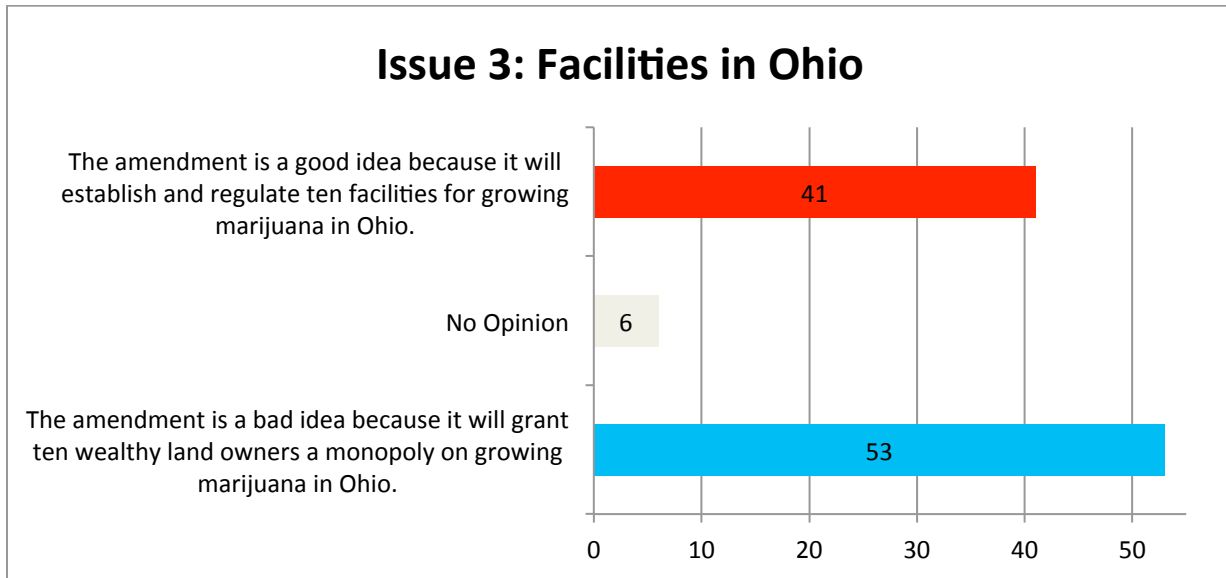
Issue 3: Three arguments concerning Issue 3 (marijuana) were presented to all respondents. On two arguments—legalizing the use of marijuana and new taxes on marijuana—a majority of Ohio registered voters supports Issue 3, and on the other—creating facilities to grow marijuana, a majority oppose it.

1. Legalizing use of marijuana



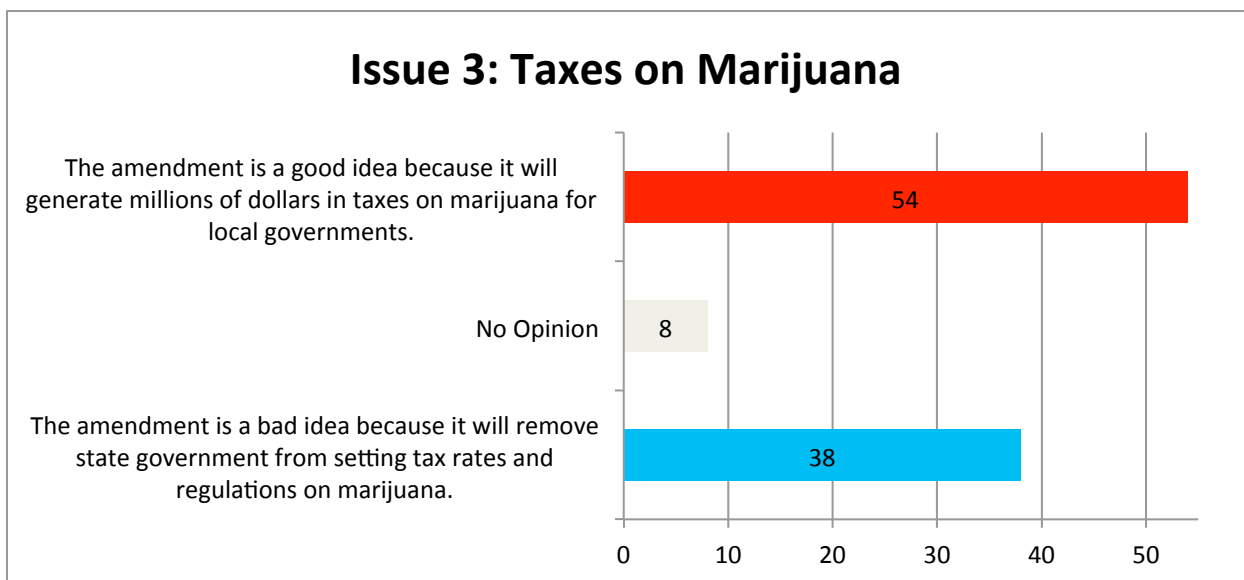
More than one-half of registered voters (53 percent) say Issue 3 is a “good idea” because it allows citizens to use marijuana for personal or medical purposes. At the same time, more than two-fifths (43 percent) say Issue 3 is a “bad idea” because it encourages citizens, including children, to use marijuana and other drugs. (The remaining 4 percent of respondents have no opinion.)

2. Facilities for growing marijuana in Ohio



About two-fifths of registered voters (41 percent) say Issue 3 is a “good idea” because it will establish and regulate ten facilities for growing marijuana in Ohio. At the same time, more than one-half (53 percent) say Issue 3 is a “bad idea” because it will grant ten wealthy landowners a monopoly on growing marijuana in Ohio. (The remaining 6 percent of respondents have no opinion.)

3. Taxes generated from marijuana



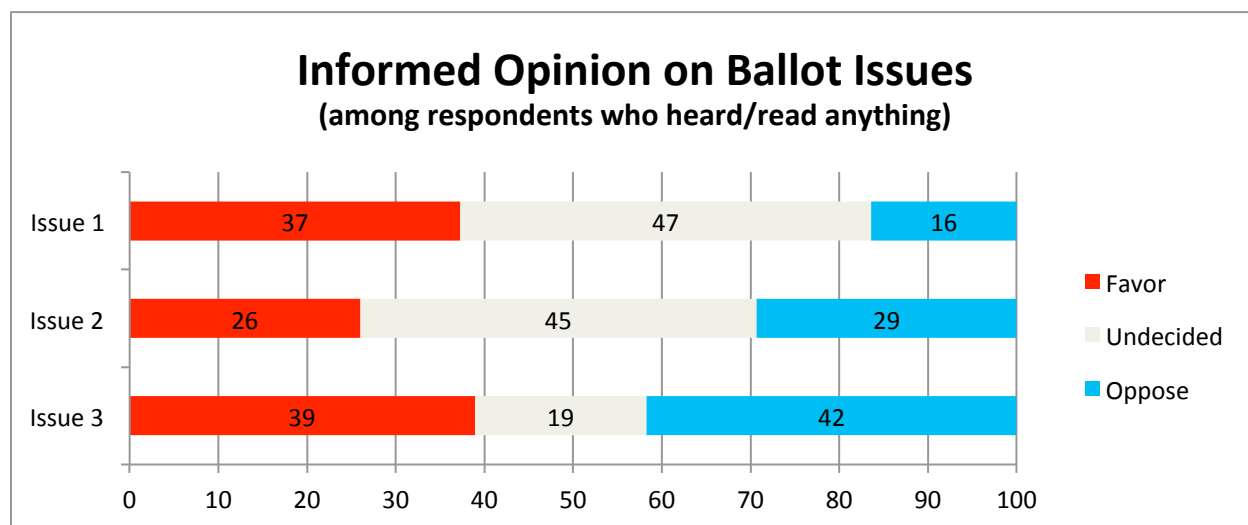
More than one-half of registered voters (54 percent) say Issue 3 is a “good idea” because it will generate millions of dollars in taxes on marijuana for local governments. At the same time, less than two-fifths

(38 percent) say Issue 3 is a “bad idea” because it will remove state government from setting tax rates and regulations on marijuana. (The remaining 8 percent of respondents have no opinion.)

To the extent that voters turn out and cast their ballots on the basis of legalizing and/or taxes on marijuana, Issue 3 will likely pass. However, if ballots are cast on the facilities question, it may diminish the likelihood of passage.

Information, Arguments, and Opinion on the Ballot Issues

Overall, there was substantial variation in views on the ballot issues among registered voters who report hearing or reading anything about the proposed amendments (“minimally informed” voters).



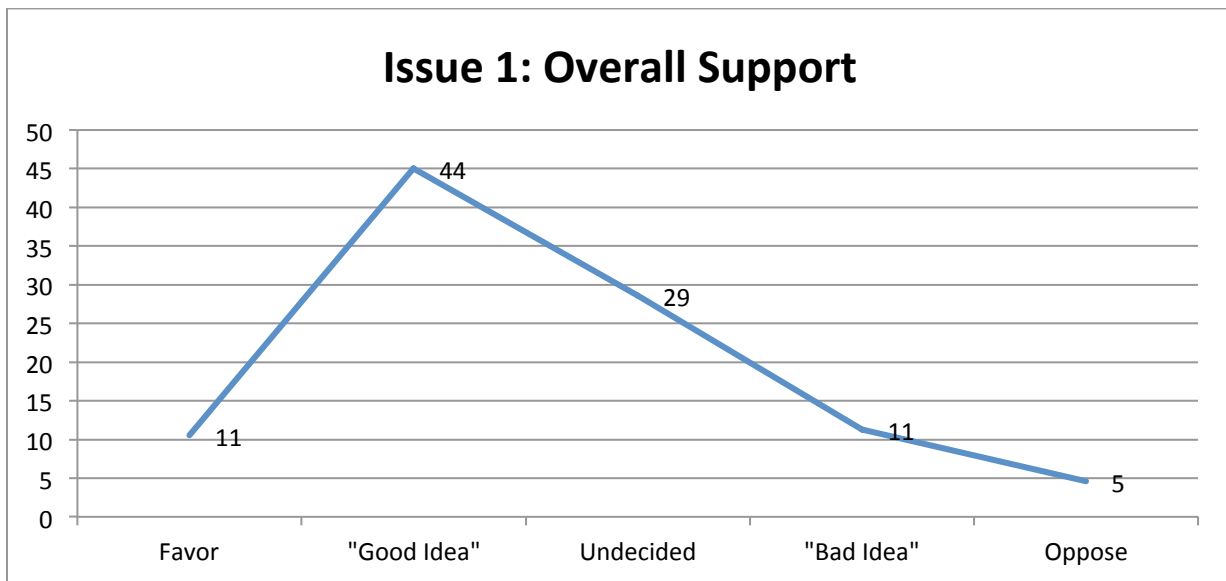
Among minimally informed voters, more than one-third (37 percent) favor Issue 1 (redistricting) and about one-sixth oppose it (16 percent), with almost one-half undecided (47 percent). Put another way, Issue 1 is favored more than two-to-one (70 to 30 percent) by respondents with an opinion on this ballot issue. However, a large majority of Ohio registered voters are undecided or report receiving no information on Issue 1.

Minimally informed voters are more evenly divided on Issue 2 (monopoly), with one-quarter (26 percent) in favor and more than one-quarter opposed (29 percent), and 45 percent undecided. Put another way, Issue 2 is on balance opposed (47 to 53 percent) by respondents with an opinion on this ballot issue. But here, too, a large majority of Ohio registered voters are undecided or have not received information on Issue 2.

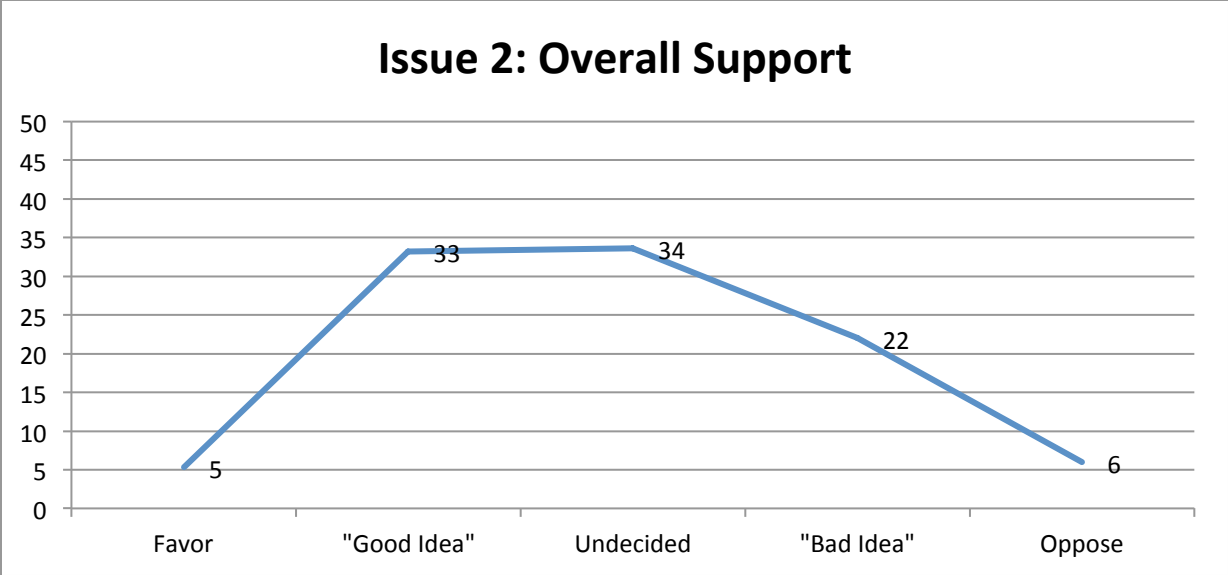
On Issue 3 (marijuana), almost two-fifths (39 percent) of these minimally informed voters favor it, about two-fifths (42 percent) are opposed, with 19 percent undecided. Put another way, Issue 3 is on balance opposed (48 to 52 percent) by respondents with an opinion on this ballot issue. Only a minority of Ohio registered voters lack an opinion or minimal information on Issue 3.

Given the number of respondents who lack an opinion or report receiving no information on the ballot issues, an overall measure of public opinion was created to assess likely support and opposition to each ballot issue.

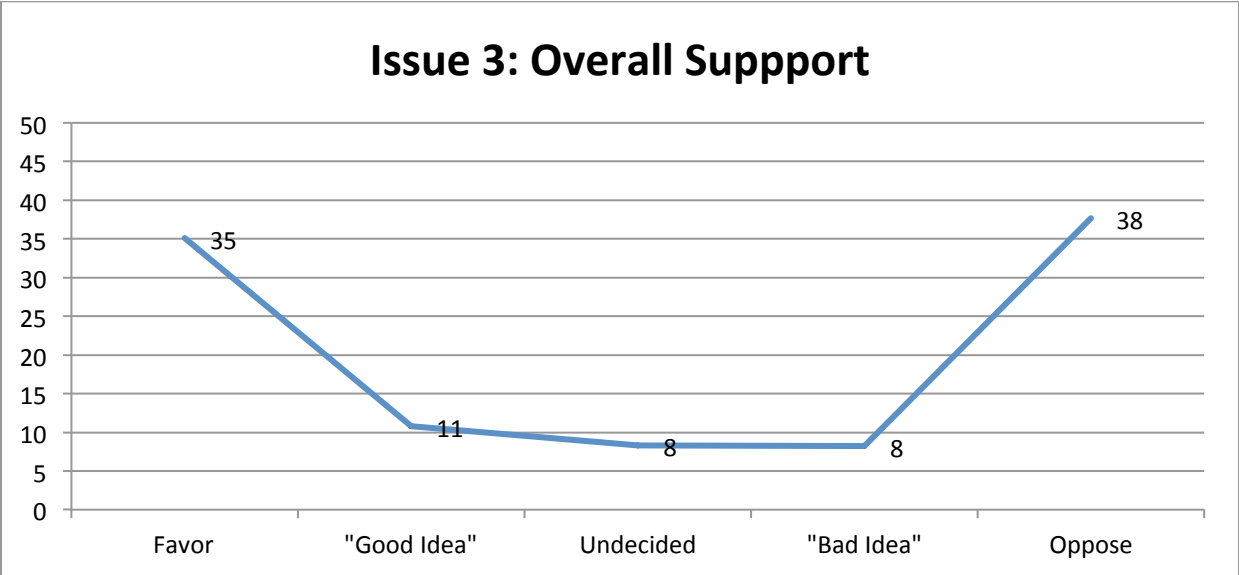
This measure combined minimally informed respondents who favor or oppose the ballot issues with undecided/uninformed voters based on their views of the arguments about the ballot issues. The latter category was divided into net positive (“good idea”) and net negative (“bad idea”) opinion. The undecided had no net positive or negative views on the arguments presented.



In terms of overall support, more than one-half of registered voters (55 percent) are supportive of Issue 1 (redistricting). The largest category (44 percent) says that Issue 1 is a “good idea” and most of these respondents had not heard or read anything about the amendment. Meanwhile, about one-sixth (16 percent) of respondents are not supportive of Issue 1. (The remaining 29 percent are undecided.)



In terms of overall support, almost two-fifths of registered voters (38 percent) are supportive of Issue 2 (monopoly). The largest category (33 percent) says that Issue 2 is a “good idea” and most of these respondents had not heard or read anything about this amendment. Meanwhile, more than one-quarter (28 percent) of respondents are not supportive of Issue 2. (The remaining 34 percent are undecided.)



In terms of overall support, almost one-half of registered voters (46 percent) are supportive of Issue 3 (marijuana). Meanwhile, the same proportion (46 percent) is not supportive of Issue 3. (The remaining 8 percent are undecided.) Unlike Issues 1 and 2, the largest categories of respondents have heard/read something about the amendment and also have an opinion about it.

How do the opinions on the ballot issues relate to one another?

On the one hand, registered voters who are supportive of Issue 1 (redistricting) also tend to favor Issue 2 (monopoly) and Issue 3 (marijuana)—and vice versa.

On the other hand, registered voters who are supportive of Issue 2 tend to oppose Issue 3—and vice versa. This pattern reflects a potential legal conflict between the two constitutional amendments. However, some respondents support both ballot issues: more than one-third of Issue 2 supporters also support Issue 3, while about two-fifths of Issue 3 supporters also back Issue 2.

Ballot Issues, Demography, and Political Attitudes

For Issue 1 (redistricting), there are few significant demographic or political differences on the overall opinion. Registered voters 65 or older, strong Republicans, and extremely conservative voters are modestly less supportive of the proposed amendment. At the same time, nonwhite voters are also less supportive than white voters.

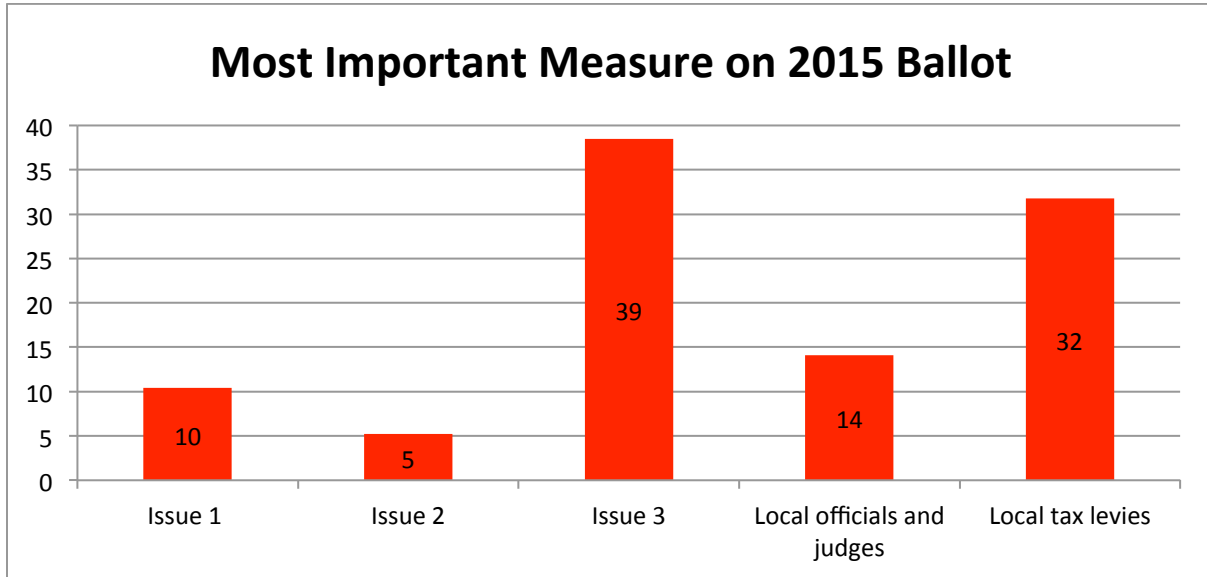
For Issue 2 (monopoly), there are also a few significant demographic or political differences on overall opinion. Registered voters who are male and conservative are more opposed to the proposed amendment.

For Issue 3 (marijuana), there are significant demographic factors on overall opinion. Younger registered voters are more supportive than older voters, and non-white voters are more supportive than whites. Regular worship attenders are less supportive of Issue 3, while non-attenders are more supportive. Well-educated respondents (a college or post-graduate degree) and affluent respondents (\$75,000 a year or more) are less supportive of the proposed amendment as well.

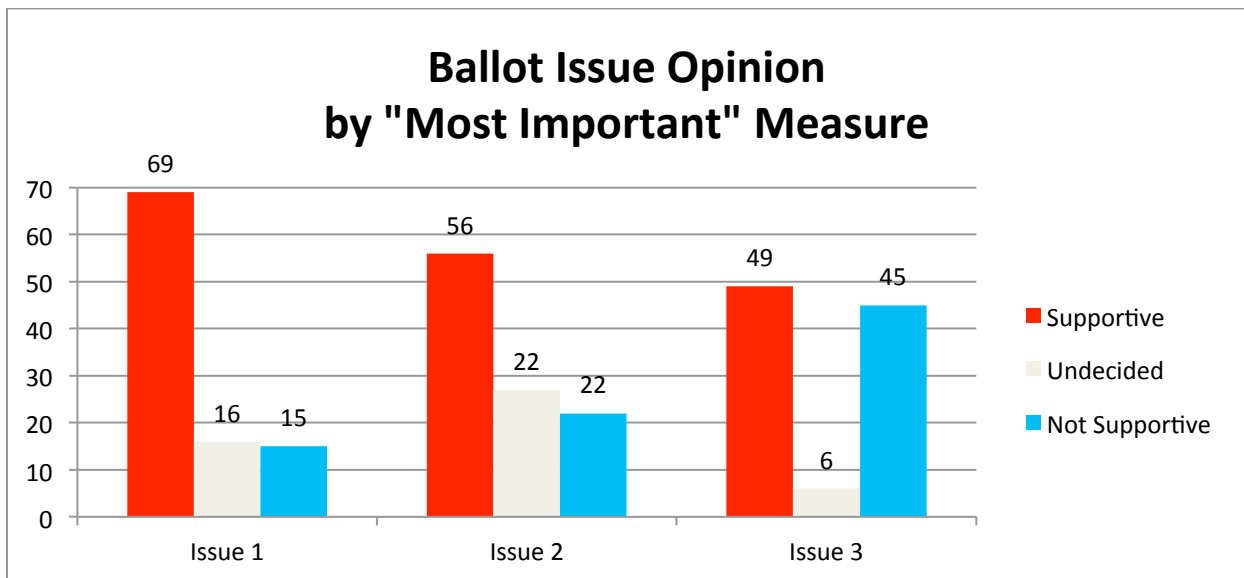
There are also significant political differences in aggregate opinion for Issue 3 (marijuana), with liberals and Democrats more supportive, while conservatives and Republicans are less supportive.

Salience of Ballot Issues to Voters

All respondents were asked: *Which of the following things on the ballot is MOST important to you in the November 2015 election?*



Almost two-fifths (39 percent) of Ohio registered voters say that Issue 3 (marijuana) is the “most important” measure on the 2015 ballot. In contrast, one-tenth (10 percent) identify Issue 1 (redistricting) as most important and one-twentieth (5 percent) mention Issue 2 (monopoly). Meanwhile, almost one-third of respondents (32 percent) say local tax levies are the most important measure and about one-seventh (14 percent) say local officials and judges.



Overall, registered voters who identify a ballot issue as “most important” are supportive of it. For Issue 1 (redistricting), more than two-thirds (69 percent) of the respondents who say it is “most important” are supportive. For Issue 2 (monopoly), the comparable figure is more than one-half (56 percent), and for Issue 3 (marijuana), almost one-half (49 percent) are supportive—but note that almost as many respondents (45 percent) are not supportive of Issue 3.

How do the salience of the ballot issues relate to one another?

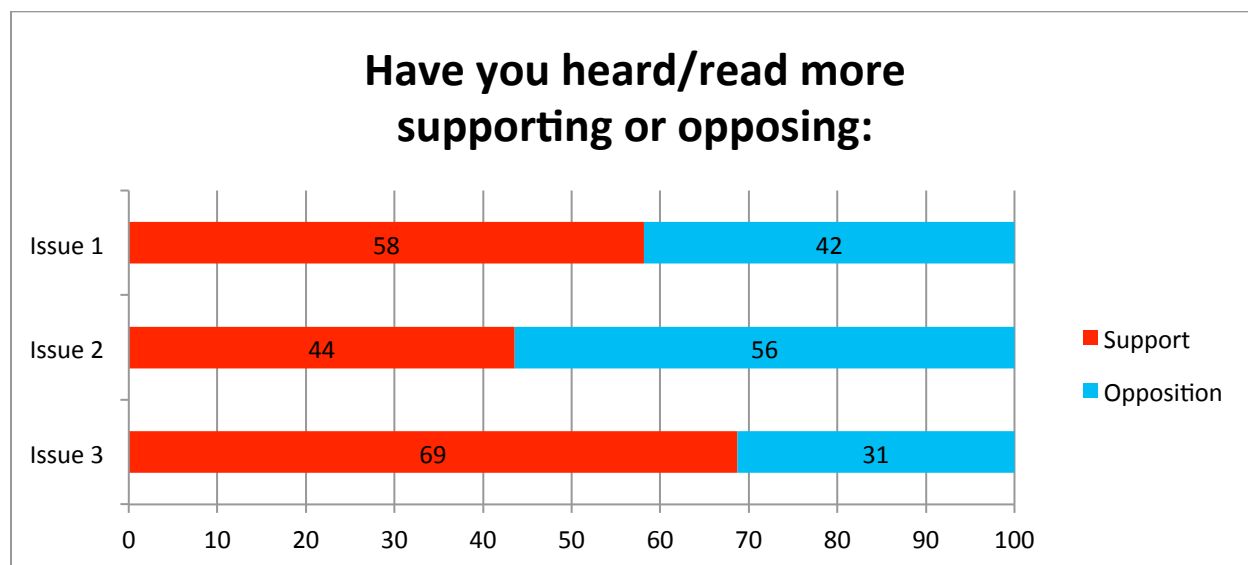
Respondents who say Issue 3 (marijuana) is “most important” are on balance supportive of Issue 1 (redistricting) and vice versa. And a similar reciprocal pattern of support holds for Issues 1 and 2.

Not surprisingly, respondents who regard Issue 3 as most important are less supportive of Issue 2, while respondents who regard Issue 2 as most important are less supportive of Issue 3.

Respondents who say local tax levies or local officials are the “most important” things on the ballot are supportive of Issue 1, slightly in favor of Issue 2, and modestly opposed to Issue 3.

Content of Information on Ballot Issues

Overall, there is variation in the content of the ballot issue information received by Ohio registered voters who report hearing or reading anything about the ballot measures (“minimally informed” voters).



Minimally informed voters report more positive than negative information on Issue 1 (redistricting, 58 to 42 percent). A similar pattern held for Issue 3 (marijuana): more than twice as many respondents report more positive than negative information (69 to 31 percent).

In contrast, on Issue 2 (monopoly), minimally informed voters report less information supporting than opposing it (44 to 56 percent).

Receipt of positive information supportive of each ballot issue is closely linked to support among registered voters. The best evidence for this pattern is for Issue 3 (marijuana). During the field period of the survey, overall support for Issue 3 increased by 7 percentage points, while the salience of the issue grew by 8 percentage points.[†]

Ballot Issues and Turnout

Overall support for the three ballot issues is not strongly associated with standard measures of voter turnout, such as interest in the election and past voting behavior.

For example, an estimated turnout of 30 percent produces a slight advantage in favor of Issue 3 (marijuana, 51 to 49 percent), while an estimated turnout of 40 percent produces a slight advantage in opposition of Issue 3 (49 to 51 percent). However, an estimate of 50 percent turnout shows Issue 3 with an advantage (52 to 48 percent).

This pattern suggests that the election outcome may depend less on the overall level of turnout and more by the mix of voters who actually cast a ballot.

If, for example, the voters turning out in 2015 resemble the characteristics of the 2014 gubernatorial election (a good Republican year), Issue 3 would have a disadvantage (45 to 55 percent). But if the voters who turn out resemble 2012 (a good Democratic year), Issue 3 would have an advantage (52 to 48 percent). And if turnout of Issue 3 supporters is ten percentage points greater than opponents, Issue 3 may prevail by a comfortable margin (54 to 46 percent). The reverse is true if opponents of Issue 3 have a comparable advantage in turnout.

[†] In the final days of the field period for the survey, Issue 3 was favored 41 to 38 percent among minimally informed voters.