



TOP FINDINGS FROM THE OVB SURVEYS

The summary points below draw from three statewide surveys conducted in April and May 2013. Final sample sizes were 3,971 respondents for Survey #1, 1,958 for Survey #2, and 1,865 for Survey #3. DHM Research and PolicyInteractive Research designed and administered the study using telephone and online formats to aid accessibility and help obtain a representative sample. Enough interviews were completed in five geographic regions (Central, Eastern, Portland Metro, Southern, and Willamette) to permit statistically reliable analysis at the regional level. The research design used quotas and statistical weighting based on the U.S. Census to ensure representativeness within regions by age, gender, and income. The regions were then weighted proportionally by population per the U.S. Census to yield statewide results.

In addition to the statistical sampling whose highlights appear below, the research project includes an ongoing public involvement process inviting all citizens to weigh in by taking full or abbreviated versions of the questionnaires administered in the three surveys. This public involvement track is being managed as a separate source of data and will eventually be merged into a master file where the methods of information gathering are clearly identified and available for public access and research purposes.

This study stands out from others in that, when asking questions about policy priorities with cost implications, we inform respondents that rating an item as “important” or “desirable” means willingness to support some increase in taxes or reallocation of funds from other public services. The visual surveys used \$ symbols to emphasize the real-world implications of policy preferences.

This summary of key findings, observations and conclusions reflects the judgment of the research partners and not necessarily the views of the sponsoring organizations.

1. Education Comes First (Especially K-12):

Oregonians consider education funding and quality the most important issue they want their state and local government officials to do something about, along with the economy/jobs and government spending/taxation (S1.4, 5). ***From a list of 20 services “K-12 education services” received the highest rating of importance at 81% and was the only item to exceed 50% strong feeling (S1.8).*** Oregonians view K-12 education services as a higher priority than post-secondary education. They also want more parent involvement in children’s education, and graduates who know more about money management and have better learned the lessons of citizenship, work, and family. They foresee schools being fundamentally different places in 10 years involving new classroom atmospheres and teaching techniques. Support



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for post-secondary education is strong, with 76% wanting reduced tuition to improve accessibility.

2. Wellness & Personal Responsibility Are Primary Healthcare Values:

Given a list of possible public focus areas in health care, 77% of Oregonians find it desirable that ***Wellness and healthy living replaces the treatment of illnesses as the primary goal and focus of the healthcare industry,*** compared to 14% who find that outcome undesirable (S2.21). Supporting the finding that personal responsibility is important to residents, 72% find it desirable that ***People are held accountable for high risk behaviors like smoking, drugs, and lack of exercise through higher insurance premiums,*** compared to 22% who find this undesirable (S2.23). A very similar result arose when testing the statement, ***To control health insurance costs for everyone, public and private insurance programs will reward good health behaviors and discourage bad health behaviors*** (S3.18). Most Oregonians reported satisfaction with their access to a range of health care services, with similar results across all geographic regions (S2.34-40). 70% of Oregonians want equal access to basic, quality healthcare assured for all people (S2.28). But, opinion is divided on whether to ***Establish a universal publicly funded health delivery system to replace the system we have now*** (S2.25): 47% see this outcome “desirable,” 28% see it as “undesirable,” and 25% are neutral or undecided. Overall this set of findings lead to the conclusion that Oregonians favor personal responsibility and put more emphasis on good lifestyle over public support for treating illnesses.

3. Environmental Quality and Protection Are Important:

Oregonians value the state’s natural beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, and relatively clean air and water. They also value a good economy, but they want an approach to economic development that recognizes the importance of the state’s natural environment to its quality of life. Asked to choose: ***A. Economic growth should be given priority even if the environment suffers to some extent or B. Protection of the environment should be given more priority even at the risk of slowing economic growth,*** 57% of Oregonians favor environmental protection and 35% choose economic growth (S1.27). This finding is validated through all three surveys using a number of different question styles, levels of detail, and relationships with other cultural values. When asked qualitatively what they value about Oregon (as an open response in their own words), fully 78% of the responses include environmentally positive terms, 17% refer to the friendliness of the people and Oregon’s climate, and 5% touch broadly on other topics. “Natural landscapes,” “cleanness of air and water,” “green landscape,” “forests and mountains,” and “open spaces” are the kinds of spontaneous replies we encountered again and again, demonstrating that values related to environmental quality are paramount to Oregon’s citizens.

4. Public Transportation Instead of New Roads:

A majority of Oregonians support ***investment in public transit*** and consider such investment more important than ***investing in roads for cars.*** Regionally,

majorities support these findings in Southern Oregon, Portland Metro, and Willamette Valley, while opinion is split in Central and Eastern Oregon (S1.28). Oregonians find the proposal to **shift some funding for road and highway construction towards public transportation such as better bus service and high speed rail projects** desirable at a 1.7 to 1.0 ratio, with 21% feeling neutral (S2.50). Supportive views on public transit are consistent with responses for dealing with climate change as measured in the survey. On the other hand, when asked about a list of public service priorities, Oregonians rank **road and highway maintenance** (72% taxpayer support) above **public transportation like buses and trains** (55% support) and **new roads and highways** (49% support) (S1.12, 13, 23). It appears that Oregonians want to take care of the roads they have while recognizing that public transportation investments could be a better choice than roads for the future.

5. Natural Resource Protections for Future Generations:

Oregonians greatly value farm and forestland and want to conserve it. Asked about the statement, **New population growth will be directed toward existing cities and towns, not into natural areas and farmlands**, 58% of residents say such a trend would be desirable compared to 15% who say undesirable and 21% who are neutral. The expectation of this occurring is in sync with the public's desirability view, meaning that existing policy is balanced with this public value (S3.17). Oregonians opposed the statement **Revamp land use laws to permit more development** by a 2:1 ratio, with strong feelings running 3:1 and 22% neutral (S3.24). These findings suggest that residents support concentrating growth within existing cities and towns to save farmland and stop sprawl. They see Oregon's land use system as a way to protect the livability and quality of life they want at the statewide and local levels. The third most valued service from a list of twenty public service priorities requiring tax allocations, **protection of clean air and water**, was judged important by 74%, just below **K-12 education services** and **public safety like fire and police protection** (S1.15,8,7).

6. Incarceration Policies Questioned:

Oregonians across all regions prefer rehabilitation of criminals through counseling and job training over locking them up in prison by more than a 2:1 margin. Forcing a choice between statement A (**Criminals should be punished by just locking them up**) and statement B (**Criminals should be rehabilitated through counseling & job training whenever possible**) we find 27% supporting imprisonment vs. 66% who prefer rehabilitation (S1.26). The question provided no information about the dollars currently spent on each approach; however, the finding validates a 2012 statewide survey that did give budget information and also showed support for alternative approaches to imprisonment and parole when dealing with non-violent offenders.

7. Taxes Viewed as Necessary But Details Are Contested:

The statement **Taxes are necessary to pay for the common good** wins extremely high agreement at 86% (S2.10). On perceptions of fairness and efficiency in taxation, however, the tables are turned. The statement, **Our tax**

system is fair earns more disagreement than agreement by a ratio well over 2:1, with only 27% in agreement (S2.11). In addition, most Oregonians think that **government is wasteful and inefficient with our taxes and cannot be trusted to make good decisions** (64% agreement vs. 29% disagreement) (S2.13); and 7:1 agree that **our tax system should be overhauled to be more simple and straightforward** (S2.12). The theme of unhappiness with taxation is also seen in comments about what state and local government officials should do something about and why Oregon will be a worse place in 10 years. Yet citizens are very mixed about the proper solutions given a variety of alternatives. Oregonians are looking for changes in governance and public finance.

8. Climate Concern Comes of Age:

Public opinion appears to be crystallizing on this issue after several decades of skepticism and uncertainty. Given a choice between statement A (**Climate change requires us to change our way of life such as driving less or living more simply**) and statement B (**If climate change becomes a problem we can deal with it later**) 72% opt for “change way of life” vs. 21% who say “deal with it later”—more than a 3:1 ratio (S1.32). This result was consistent across all five geographic regions, with Portland’s metro counties going over 4:1 in favor of statement “A” and Eastern Oregon lowest but still higher than 2:1.

9. Oregonians Care about our Children:

Oregon residents show they value the care and nurturing of children across numerous topics. Statements introduced with clearly implied costs to taxpayers won significant support, such as **Ensure children have access to nutritious food at school** (79% support) (S2.29) and **Ensure all children regardless of income or race have access to essential healthcare** (77% support) (S2.30). Oregonians feel some ambivalence to broad welfare support but not when it comes to the care of children.

10. The Optimist and the Pessimist Are Within Us:

Asked whether **Oregonians from diverse backgrounds will find common ground and work together to make progress addressing the critical issues we face as a state**, 84% say the goal is desirable but only 42% think it probable, suggesting a significant degree of pessimism (S3.21). Yet many issues that are often perceived as divisive in fact reveal both broad and strong agreement across demographic and ideological sectors, including the perceived urban-rural divide. This finding implies that our internal differences may be smaller than portrayed in the media or by politicians, and that a commonly shared set of values and beliefs underlies the differences that do exist. However, there is also a broadly held view that elected officials are unlikely to rise above the influence of special interests and partisanship to build on these shared values and make progress on critical issues. In their personal lives, however, Oregonians feel relatively satisfied and optimistic about their futures. Asked **When you think about Oregon ten years from now, do you think it will be a better place to live, about the same as it is today, or worse**

than today? most take a middle position (44% “the same”), with the extremes fairly balanced (27% “better” and 24% “worse”) (S2.1). But to the question, **How optimistic are you about your personal future over the next five years?** 78% reply with optimism, 11% are neither nor optimistic nor pessimistic, and just 11% are pessimistic (S1.3).

11. In the workplace, money isn’t everything:

Of 12 values that people often feel are important in what they do for work or employment, among all Oregonians, the top 4 *most* important were: **doing a job I can be proud of; enjoying work, having fun; obtaining health insurance coverage; and earning a good salary.** The lowest ranked as most important were: **having people admire my accomplishments** and **being in a leadership position.** **Contributing to society’s benefit** fell into the bottom half (S2,54-65).

12. Little enthusiasm for government action to improve the economy:

Fewer than 20% of Oregonians mentioned spontaneously that unemployment and economic growth were issues they want their state and local government officials do something about. Other issues like education and government spending/taxation were volunteered at about the same rate. Meanwhile, other findings suggest Oregonians are lukewarm about government action to help the economy. Respondents rate **economic development like subsidies and tax breaks for business attraction or expansion** the lowest of 20 different public priorities which necessitate taxable support (S1.14), while less than half of Oregonians support reducing government regulations and revamping land use laws to help the economy (S3.23, 24). Neither were Oregonians keen to **reduce business taxes** and **provide publicly funded venture capital for start-up companies** (S3.27, 31). On the other hand, we do find support across the state to **increase timber harvests in dense, over-crowded forest stands** and a willingness to pay something more to **increase workforce training** at 53% and 69% respectively (S3.22, 28).

13. The Urban/Rural Divide: No And Yes

Oregonians across the state have similar values and beliefs about many things. Whether you live in Northwest Portland or on a ranch in eastern Oregon, you are likely to value the same things about living in Oregon and to rate the importance of public services similarly. A majority of Oregonians in each region of the state **want protection of productive farm and forest land from development** (S1.25), feel **climate change requires us to change our way of life such as driving less or living more simply** (S.1.32), and are willing to pay more to **ensure children have access to nutritious food at school** (S2.29) and to **create greater access to mental health services** (S2, 33). Furthermore, Oregonians across the state feel that **personal income taxes are just too high** (S2.8), that **change is needed in Oregon’s tax system** (S2.5), and that **government is wasteful and inefficient with our taxes and cannot be trusted to make good decisions** (S2.13). Agreement on these issues, however, does not mean we find no differences. For example, relating to the use of natural resources, rural areas of the state, where the

economies are slower, are more likely to agree that **economic growth should be given priority even if the environment suffers to some extent** (S1.27) and to support **increase timber harvests in dense, over-crowded forest stands** (S3.22). But rarely are these differences more than a small margin. And though there are proportionally more Republicans in Central, Eastern, and Southern Oregon than in Portland Metro and the Willamette regions, a plurality of Oregonians in all regions consider themselves **moderate on social and economic issues** (S1.D5-6).

14. "Consumer Driven Economy" – Rethinking Progress?

Given a choice between statement A (**Our country would be better off if we all consumed less**) or B (**We need to buy things to support a strong economy**), 57% of Oregonians favor consuming less (29% strongly), with 35% preferring to buy things (14% strongly) (S1.31). Two other findings in the survey validate this result and suggest a growing tendency to question our consumer-driven economy: (i) 57% of Oregonians feel **climate change requires us to change our way of life such as driving less or living more simply** (S1.31); and (ii) 57% favor the **protection of the environment even at the risk of slowing economic growth** (S1.27).

15. Oregon is Not a Religious State? Maybe, If You Ignore Half of Us

Much has been said over the years about Oregon as one of the least religious states in the country, and indeed there is national research that puts Oregon in the bottom 10 when residents are asked whether they believe in God. But those who make the leap to conclude that Oregon is not a religious state are on shaky ground. Four results make this point: (i) More than a majority of Oregonians are at least **moderately religious** (57%), (ii) half say that **religion is important in my daily life** (S1.19, 20); (iii) about a third (35%) say they **attend religious services monthly or more often**, and more are likely to be attending less often (S1.21); and (iv) 40% feel that **religion and spirituality becoming more important over the next 10 years** would be a desirable trend (24% very desirable), compared to 28% who feel it would be undesirable, and about the same percentage who feel neutral (S3.20). How these results compare to other states is hard to say without administering the same questions to the full population in those states. However, believing Oregon is not a religious state may be on a wing and a prayer.