

Survey: Voters like Perry but don't want him running for president

Poll gives governor his best marks in years but shows Hutchison could lose a primary.

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Republican Gov. Rick Perry enters the 2011 legislative session more popular than he's been in years but not so popular that Texans want him to run for president, according to a new poll commissioned by the American-Statesman and other newspapers.

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, meanwhile, could be vulnerable to defeat in the Republican primary if she runs for re-election next year.

Perry posted his highest job approval rate — 51 percent — and his lowest disapproval rate — 30 percent — in five years, pollster Mickey Blum said.

About half the voters in the state think Texas is headed in the right direction.

"People think Perry's doing the right thing," Blum said.

Perry won an unprecedented third full term in November when he captured 55 percent of the vote against Democrat Bill White, the former mayor of Houston. After the election, Perry launched a national push to promote his book, "Fed Up! Our Fight to Save America From Washington," which renewed speculation that he was planning a presidential campaign.

But 63 percent of registered voters said he should not run for president in 2012.

"This is not necessarily a statement of no confidence," Blum said. "Although Democrats are least enthusiastic about a presidential run, even Republicans and Perry's voters from 2010 don't want him running, perhaps because they want him to stay on as governor."

By comparison, in a poll Blum conducted for The Dallas Morning News and Houston Chronicle in the fall of 1998, more than half of likely voters said they wanted then-Gov. George W. Bush to run for president.

Still, Blum said she expects support for Perry would be strong if he went ahead and decided to run.

Perry and his team have consistently said that won't happen.

"The governor has stated numerous times he has no intention to run for president," Perry spokesman Mark Miner said. "The best job in the country is being governor of Texas, and more policies should be coming from the states."

Elijah Lackey, a 75-year-old retired federal worker from Midlothian, said Perry should not run.

"I believe he is a pretty fair person for the state of Texas, but I think there are things he doesn't know about the federal government," Lackey said.

Perry had an extraordinary political year in 2010, beginning with his decisive win over Hutchison in the Republican gubernatorial primary in March. Hutchison, it seems, has not recovered.

Not long ago considered the state's most popular politician, Hutchison has a 46 percent approval rating among registered voters. Her approval rating among Republicans is 56 percent. Perry's, by comparison, is 73 percent.

"The fact that she only has 56 percent makes her vulnerable to a primary," Blum said. "You would expect more Republicans to approve of a senator from their party."

Hutchison, famously indecisive about her political plans, has not said whether she will seek re-election when her Senate term comes up next year. Republican car dealer Roger Williams is already running for the seat, and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst might enter the GOP primary later this year.

Hutchison spokeswoman Courtney Sanders said: "Senator Hutchison appreciates these high approval ratings after such a hard-fought primary. She is working hard to fulfill her duties in the Senate, and she's concentrating on the start of the new session.

"We'll let you know when there's an announcement to be made about 2012."

Meanwhile, 72 percent of registered voters said it's unfair for lawmakers to switch parties right after an election.

Last month, Democratic state Reps. Aaron Peña of Edinburg and Allan Ritter of Nederland, fresh off their re-elections in November, switched to the Republican Party.

"If I'm voting for someone who, say, is running as a Republican, and they say, 'I'm not really Republican; I'm going to be a Democrat,' that's kind of a violation of my trust," said San Antonio resident Bradley Stout, 57, who is retired from the Army.

The telephone poll of 819 Texans, including 716 registered voters, was conducted for a consortium of Texas newspapers Dec. 28 through Jan. 5 by Blum & Weprin Associates. The poll of likely voters has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The American-Statesman, The Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News commissioned the poll.

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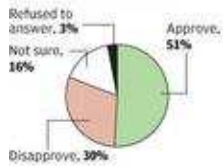
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How respondents answered

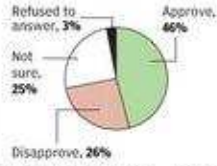
Do you approve or disapprove of the job **Rick Perry** is doing as governor?

Among 716 registered voters



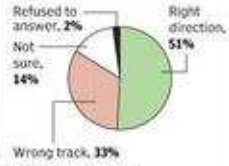
Do you approve or disapprove of the job **Kay Bailey Hutchison** is doing as senator?

Among 716 registered voters



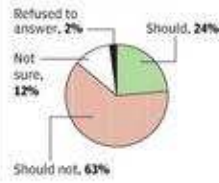
Generally speaking, would you say things in Texas are heading in the **right direction**, or are they off on the **wrong track**?

Among 716 registered voters



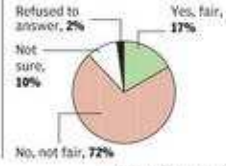
Do you think Texas Gov. **Rick Perry** should or should not run for president in two years?

Among 716 registered voters



Do you think it is fair to voters for a lawmaker in their district to **switch parties** right after an election or don't you think so?

Among 716 registered voters



Note: Percentages might not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Blum & Weprin Associates

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