

The Rhode Island Survey Initiative

The Rhode Island Survey Initiative is led by the University of Rhode Island's Harrington School for Communication and Media; the Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy; and the Department of Political Science. URI faculty and students identified issue areas, formulated survey questions, and analyzed results.

The first edition of the Rhode Island survey was administered by YouGov, an international internet-based market research and data analytics firm, between August 17 to September 6, 2023. The survey has a representative sample size of 500 Rhode Island residents who are 18 years old or above. Respondents were selected from YouGov's opt-in panel using sample matching. The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 presidential vote choice as well as a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (2-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight. The margin of error is +/- 5.3%.

Section 1: Public Education

Overview: Survey respondents expressed concerns over staffing shortages and poor standardized test scores. Most support increased funding for K-12 as well as higher education, while education initiatives introduced recently in the Rhode Island General Assembly have strong support.

1. How satisfied are you with the overall quality of K-12 public schools in your community?
 - 13% Very satisfied
 - 29% Somewhat satisfied
 - 25% Neutral
 - 14% Not very satisfied
 - 7% Not at all satisfied
 - 12% I don't know
2. Should total state government funding levels for Rhode Island public colleges and universities increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
 - 23% Greatly increase
 - 30% Slightly increase
 - 24% Stay about the same
 - 5% Slightly decrease

- 5% Greatly decrease
 - 13% Don't know
3. Should total state and local government funding levels for K-12 public schools in Rhode Island increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
- 35% Greatly increase
 - 32% Slightly increase
 - 17% Stay about the same
 - 4% Slightly decrease
 - 2% Greatly decrease
 - 10% Don't know
4. There has been discussion about changing the statewide funding formula for K-12 public schools in Rhode Island. To what extent do you support allocating funds more equitably to better serve historically disadvantaged school districts in Rhode Island?
- 32% Strongly support
 - 32% Somewhat support
 - 18% Neither support nor oppose
 - 6% Somewhat oppose
 - 5% Strongly oppose
 - 8% Don't know
5. To what extent do you support expanding charter schools throughout Rhode Island?
- 20% Strongly support
 - 26% Somewhat support
 - 30% Neither support nor oppose
 - 9% Somewhat oppose
 - 7% Strongly oppose
 - 8% Don't know
6. Are Rhode Island teachers' unions too powerful, not powerful enough, or at the right level of power?
- 21% Too powerful
 - 27% Not powerful enough
 - 22% Right level of power
 - 30% Don't know

7. To what extent do you agree that your local school board or committee puts the needs of students above all else?
 - 16% Strongly agree
 - 25% Somewhat agree
 - 20% Neither agree nor disagree
 - 19% Somewhat disagree
 - 10% Strongly disagree
 - 11% Don't know

8. To what extent do you agree that parents should have a significant role in the decision making process for their child's public school curriculum in Rhode Island?
 - 33% Strongly agree
 - 28% Somewhat agree
 - 18% Neither agree nor disagree
 - 12% Somewhat disagree
 - 5% Strongly disagree
 - 4% Don't know

9. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Rhode Island K-12 public schools should teach about the historical mistreatment of minorities.
 - 36% Strongly agree
 - 23% Somewhat agree
 - 21% Neither agree nor disagree
 - 6% Somewhat disagree
 - 9% Strongly disagree
 - 5% Don't know

10. What is the most important problem facing Rhode Island K-12 public school leaders today?
 - 6% Chronic student absenteeism
 - 10% Inappropriate use of cellphones/technology
 - 4% In-school substance use
 - 23% Insufficient funding
 - 32% Teacher/staff shortage
 - 11% Other
 - 14% Don't know

11. To what extent are you concerned about each of the following topics related to the curriculum in Rhode Island K-12 public schools?

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	A little concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't Know
Political indoctrination of students	22%	19%	20%	8%	19%	12%
Poor standardized test scores in reading and math	27%	32%	23%	8%	3%	8%
Underrepresentation of marginalized groups in educational materials	13%	17%	26%	13%	19%	13%

12. Below is a list of education proposals that were introduced recently in the Rhode Island General Assembly. To what extent do you approve of each proposal?

	Strongly approve	Somewhat approve	neutral	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove	Don't know
An amendment to the state constitution that guarantees a fundamental right to education in Rhode Island.	52%	20%	17%	3%	2%	6%
Legislation that creates universal pre-kindergarten courses for all children ages 3 and 4.	35%	23%	21%	6%	7%	8%
Legislation that requires free lunches to be provided for all K-12 students attending public schools.	52%	16%	16%	6%	5%	5%
Legislation that establishes public school sex education that is inclusive of LGBTQ topics for 6th-12th graders.	26%	12%	21%	11%	22%	8%
Legislation that provides state funding	30%	27%	22%	9%	6%	6%

for police officers in public schools.						
Legislation that provides state funding for social workers in public schools.	37%	30%	17%	5%	4%	6%
Legislation that requires all public high schools to provide instruction on technical and vocational training.	48%	28%	15%	3%	0.3%	6%

Section 2: Political Issues in Rhode Island

Overview: Most respondents favor increased state-level spending on education, housing, infrastructure, and aid to the poor. Only 17% view the Rhode Island economy as strong or somewhat strong. Fewer than half of respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of life in the Ocean State.

1. How satisfied are you with the overall quality of life in Rhode Island?

- 8% Very satisfied
- 37% Somewhat satisfied
- 25% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 19% Somewhat dissatisfied
- 11% Very dissatisfied

2. Below is a list of state programs. For each one, indicate whether you would like to see state-level spending increase, decrease, or stay the same.

	Increase	Decrease	Stay the same	Don't know
Education	70%	5%	21%	5%
Housing	64%	13%	16%	8%
Dealing with crime	59%	7%	25%	9%
Clean energy	49%	13%	30%	8%
Building and repairing roads and bridges	69%	6%	21%	5%
Aid to the poor	59%	8%	27%	7%
Protecting the environment	55%	12%	28%	5%
Health care	65%	8%	22%	6%

3. Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?
 - 43% Legal under any circumstances
 - 43% Legal only under certain circumstances
 - 7% Illegal in all circumstances
 - 7% Don't know

4. What do you think about the state of the Rhode Island economy these days? Would you say the state of the Rhode Island economy is:
 - 2% Very strong
 - 15% Somewhat strong
 - 34% Neither strong nor weak
 - 29% Somewhat weak
 - 20% Very weak

5. Do you think the Rhode Island government is doing too much, about enough, or too little to address climate change?
 - 14% Too much
 - 26% About enough
 - 39% Too little
 - 22% Don't know

6. Rhode Island's blue economy is defined as the economic sectors that are linked to the state's ocean and coasts. To what extent do you think it is important for Rhode Island to invest money in blue economy initiatives like wind farms?
 - 15% Extremely important
 - 23% Very important
 - 35% Moderately important
 - 14% Slightly important
 - 13% Not at all important

7. Twenty-two states allow qualified residents to register to vote and cast a ballot on the same day. To what extent do you support allowing Rhode Island residents to register to vote on the same day as election day?
 - 28% Strongly support
 - 21% Somewhat support
 - 24% Neither support nor oppose
 - 9% Somewhat oppose
 - 13% Strongly oppose

- 5% Don't know

8. To what extent are you concerned about the level of discrimination facing:

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	A little concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't know
LGBTQ people in Rhode Island	11%	10%	22%	15%	32%	10%
Racial and ethnic minorities in Rhode Island	15%	17%	22%	16%	22%	7%

Section 3: Politics and Media Usage

Overview: Television is the most popular political and election news source among survey respondents, followed by word of mouth. Most respondents trust traditional media, while about one in three respondents trust social media news sources. Facebook is the most popular social media site for getting political and election news, with 22% of respondents saying they use the site frequently for that purpose.

1. During a typical week, where do you get political and election news from? Select all that apply.
 - 22% Newspapers
 - 63% Television
 - 24% Radio
 - 20% Podcasts
 - 33% News sources unaffiliated with newspapers, television, radio, or podcast stations
 - 34% Word of mouth, such as from friends, family, co-workers, or neighbors
 - 12% I do not consume political and election news
 - 6% Other
2. During a typical week, which of the following platforms do you get your political and election news from? Select all that apply.
 - 50% Traditional (e.g., print, television, radio)

- 69% Online (e.g., computer, laptop, iPad, phone)
 - 12% I do not pay attention to political or election news.
3. During a typical week, do you get your political and election news from international, national or local sources? Select all that apply.
- 26% International
 - 66% National
 - 69% Local
 - 14% I do not pay attention to political or election news.
4. Some news organizations are frequently characterized as favoring liberal or conservative positions. Do you get most of your political and election news from politically liberal or conservative news organizations, or both?
- 20% Politically liberal news organizations, such as *The New York Times*, MSNBC, or Daily Beast
 - 10% Politically conservative news organizations, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, FOX News, or Breitbart News
 - 28% Both news organizations equally
 - 26% Neither liberal nor conservative news organizations
 - 16% Don't know

5. Name the news organization that you most frequently consume (open-ended question).
Top three national news organizations mentioned:

- Fox
- NBC
- CNN

Top three local news channels mentioned:

- WPRI
- WJAR
- The Providence Journal

6. During a typical week, which social media site do you most frequently use to get political and election news?

- 22% Facebook
- 7% Instagram
- 1% LinkedIn
- 1% Nextdoor
- 2% Reddit
- 2% Snapchat
- 8% TikTok
- 1% Tumblr
- 0.1% Twitch
- 8% Twitter
- 0.3% WhatsApp
- 7% YouTube
- 3% Other
- 35% I do not use social media sites to get political and election news.
- 4% Prefer not to disclose

7. How often do you discuss, post, or comment about political and election news on this social media site?

- 11% Often, 5-7 days in a week
- 22% Sometimes, 2-3 days a week
- 67% Rarely, 1 day a week or less

8. How much, if at all, do you trust each of the following sources when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly:

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal
Traditional media (e.g., print, television, radio)	16%	26%	34%	16%	8%
Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)	36%	33%	21%	5%	5%
National news sources	15%	20%	36%	18%	11%
State or local news sources	11%	21%	38%	21%	9%

9. How much would you say the interests, ideas, and opinions of people LIKE YOU are represented in

	Too much	The right amount	Too little
Traditional media (e.g., print, television, radio)	5%	50%	45%
Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)	15%	44%	40%
National news sources	4%	51%	46%
State or local news sources	3%	54%	43%

Section 4: Trust in Government

Overview: Majorities of respondents say they have little or no trust in federal and Rhode Island government. Local governments are slightly more trusted. Slightly more than half of respondents had a moderate amount or a great deal of trust that Rhode Island elections are fair.

1. How much trust do you have in each of the following levels of government -- a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or none at all?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
The local government where you currently live (1)	4%	10%	40%	30%	16%
The Rhode Island state government (2)	3%	8%	38%	31%	20%
The United States federal government (3)	3%	7%	34%	26%	30%

2. How much trust do you have in each branch of the Rhode Island government -- a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or none at all?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
The state executive branch headed by the Rhode Island Governor	3%	9%	38%	27%	24%
The state judicial branch headed by the Rhode Island Supreme Court	4%	13%	42%	25%	16%
The state legislative branch, consisting of the members of the Rhode Island General Assembly	2%	8%	39%	29%	23%

3. How much do you trust that elections in Rhode Island are fair?

- 24% A great deal
- 27% A moderate amount
- 21% Somewhat
- 12% A little
- 17% None at all

4. How many of the people running the Rhode Island state government are corrupt?

- 7% All
- 21% Most
- 16% About half
- 30% A few
- 2% None
- 23% Don't know

Section 5: Sense of Belonging and Political Participation

Overview: Just over a quarter of respondents approve of the job Governor Dan McKee is doing, while roughly the same number disapprove and a third say they neither approve nor disapprove. Less than half of respondents feel connected to their communities, while less than a quarter said they feel empowered to make changes.

1. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel connected to my community.	6%	31%	35%	16%	11%
I feel empowered to make changes within my community.	3%	18%	39%	24%	16%
I am similar to my neighbors in terms of values and beliefs.	5%	34%	38%	14%	9%
I interact with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds from my own.	39%	33%	21%	5%	3%

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I feel I understand the most important political issues of this state.

- 13% Strongly agree
- 35% Somewhat agree
- 36% Neither agree nor disagree
- 11% Somewhat disagree
- 6% Strongly disagree

3. In the past 12 months, how often did you discuss political and election news with friends, family, and/or neighbors?

- 11% Basically every day
- 22% A few times a week
- 20% A few times a month
- 13% Once a month
- 15% Less than once a month

- 19% Not at all
4. Here's a list of activities some people do and others do not. Please indicate if you have done each of the following activities in the past 12 months. Select all that apply.
- 7% Attended a political rally, speech, or campaign event
 - 9% Attended government meetings in your community, such as city or town council meetings
 - 14% Contacted an elected official
 - 12% Contributed money to a candidate running for public office or to a group working to elect a candidate
 - 20% Publicly expressed your support for a political candidate on Facebook, Twitter, or other social media
 - 5% Worked or volunteered for a political party, candidate, or campaign
 - 67% None of the above
5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Dan McKee is handling his job as Rhode Island Governor?
- 4% Strongly approve
 - 23% Somewhat approve
 - 33% Neither approve nor disapprove
 - 10% Somewhat disapprove
 - 17% Strongly disapprove
 - 12% Don't know
6. Did you vote in the 2022 election for governor in Rhode Island?
- 54% Yes
 - 41% No
 - 6% I do not recall
7. [If respondents voted] How did you vote in the 2022 election for RI governor:
- 19% By mail/absentee ballot
 - 16% Early, in person
 - 63% Election day, in person
 - 2% I do not recall
8. This is a question about Rhode Island political leaders. Many people don't know the answers to these types of questions, so if you don't know just indicate that. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Joe Shekarchi?
- 17% Correct (House Speaker)
 - 83% "I do not recall" or incorrect

9. Rate the following groups on a 100 degree thermometer scale, where 0° represents very cool feelings, 50° is a neutral response, and 100° means very warm feelings toward the group.

Mean Values:

- Republicans—41
- Democrats—47
- Political independents—52
- Political parties in general—39

10. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...?

a. Democrat

*follow up: Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

b. Republican

*Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

c. Independent

d. other

e. not sure

*If Independent, Other, or Not sure selected, ask the follow-up: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?

1. The Democratic Party
2. The Republican party
3. Neither
4. Not sure

- 19% Strong Democrat
- 13% Not very strong Democrat
- 12% Lean Democrat
- 22% Independent
- 12% Lean Republican
- 7% Not very strong Republican
- 8% Strong Republican
- 7% Not sure

11. Based on a 3 point party identification:

- 32% Democrat
- 15% Republican
- 38% Independent
- 4% Other
- 11% Not sure

12. Are you registered to vote?

- 81% Yes
- 16% No
- 3% Don't know

13. In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

- 10% Very liberal
- 18% Liberal
- 35% Moderate
- 17% Conservative
- 4% Very conservative
- 16% Not sure

14. Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs...

- 33% Most of the time
- 28% Some of the time
- 20% Only now and then
- 14% Hardly at all
- 5% Don't know

15. Who did you vote for in the election for President in 2020?

- 38% Joe Biden
- 22% Donald Trump
- <1% Jo Jorgensen
- <1% Howie Hawkins
- <1% Other
- 38% Did not vote for President

16. Who did you vote for in the election for President in 2016?

- 33% Hillary Clinton

- 25% Donald Trump
- 2% Gary Johnson
- 1% Jill Stein
- <1% Evan McMullin
- 3% Other
- 37% Did not vote for President

Section 6: Demographics

Demographic Breakdown of Respondents	
Men	47%
Women	52%
18-29	21%
30-54	36%
>55	42%
HS or less	37%
Some college	20%
College Degree	29%
Postgrad	14%
<40K	33%
\$40-100K	35%
>\$100K	23%
White	74%
African American	7%
Hispanic	13%
Spanish-speaking	26%
Roman Catholic	32%
Protestant	16%
Jewish	3%
Atheist	6%
Agnostic	6%
Religion - Nothing in Particular	27%
Straight/heterosexual	81%
Gay or Lesbian	7%
Bisexual	7%
Parent/Guardian with child under 18	22%