



What happened in the big Kentucky Horse Race?

Findings from a polls of the 2019 Kentucky gubernatorial election

June 1, 2020

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Cover photo by Jarrett Campbell from Cary, NC, USA

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Survey Background

- Results based on 3 surveys on likely voters in the 2019 Kentucky election for governor.
 - Primary: May 21, 2019
 - Wave 1: May-Jun 2019
 - Wave 2: August 2019
 - Wave 3: Oct-Nov 2019
 - Election Day: Nov 5, 2019
- All waves weighted on age, gender, education, race, party, and congressional district
- Testing side-by-side phone vs online for various question types.

Quick reminders



Matt Bevin – Republican
KY Governor 2015-19

704,754 votes
48.8%



Andy Beshear – Democrat
KY Governor 2019 –

709,890 votes
49.2%

Also Libertarian John Hicks 28,443 votes, 2%.

Key findings

- Matt Bevin was locally disliked from the outset of the race, but did recover somewhat as the race went on.
 - Low approval
 - Low favorability
- Trailed Andy Beshear from the outset, but closed the gap at the end. Beshear barely held on.
- Throughout the race, Bevin suffered more from localized factors than anything related to Trump.
- But affiliation with Trump did not help Bevin, either.

Bevin approval ratings

- Bevin started far behind, but did close the gap somewhat as the race continued.

	May-Jun	Aug	Oct-Nov
Strongly approve	16%	16%	24%
Somewhat approve	25%	28%	23%
Somewhat disapprove	15%	15%	12%
Strongly disapprove	40%	38%	38%
Don't Know / Refused	4%	4%	3%
<hr/>			
Total approve	41%	44%	47%
Total disapprove	55%	52%	50%
<hr/>			
Net approval	-15%	-8%	-3%
Net "strongly"	-24%	-22%	-14%

Head to head between waves

- With Bevin closing the gap at the end, Beshear held on for a very narrow win.

	May-Jun	Aug	Oct-Nov
Republican Matt Bevin	38%	39%	44%
Democrat Andy Beshear	44%	44%	45%
Some other candidate	13%	13%	7%
Unsure / Refused	4%	4%	4%
Beshear lead	+6	+5	+1

Beshear's win – by demographics

- Wide gender, race, and education gaps propelled Beshear to a very narrow victory.
- Bevin made up ground with right-leaning demos over time.

		Margin wave 1	Margin wave 3
OVERALL	Overall	6%	1%
GENDER	Male	-9%	-15%
	Female	21%	16%
AGE CATEGORIES	18 to 34	28%	7%
	35 to 49	8%	5%
	50 to 64	0%	3%
	65+	4%	-6%
RACE	White / Caucasian	0%	-6%
	All others	64%	69%
EDUCATION LEVEL	High School or less	-14%	-9%
	Some college, no degree	8%	-8%
	College graduate	7%	3%
	Advanced degree	32%	37%
INCOME RANGES	< \$25k to < \$50k	24%	6%
	\$50k to < \$100k	3%	1%
	\$100k +	-2%	-2%

Beshear's win – party & ideology

- Beshear held his party (+72) more than Bevin did (+64), though Bevin consolidated R voters near the end.
- Beshear well among moderates and liberals.
- A strong performance among independent women kept independents just close enough over all.

		Margin wave 1	Margin wave 3
OVERALL	Overall	6%	1%
PARTY ID	Dem	70%	72%
	Rep	-57%	-64%
	Ind / Other	10%	10%
5-POINT PARTY ID	Dem	70%	72%
	Lean D	72%	82%
	Ind	-11%	-7%
	Lean R	-52%	-55%
	Rep	-57%	-64%
IDEOLOGY	Liberal	79%	81%
	Moderate	29%	24%
	Conservative	-47%	-49%
PARTY AND GENDER	Dem men	62%	59%
	Dem women	75%	80%
	Rep men	-65%	-70%
	Rep women	-49%	-58%
	Ind men	-10%	-3%
	Ind women	34%	37%

Favorability comparisons

- Matt Bevin began with net unfavorables and 44% “very unfavorable.”
- People never grew to like Bevin more .
- Andy Beshear saw unfavorables rise somewhat, but remained net positive.

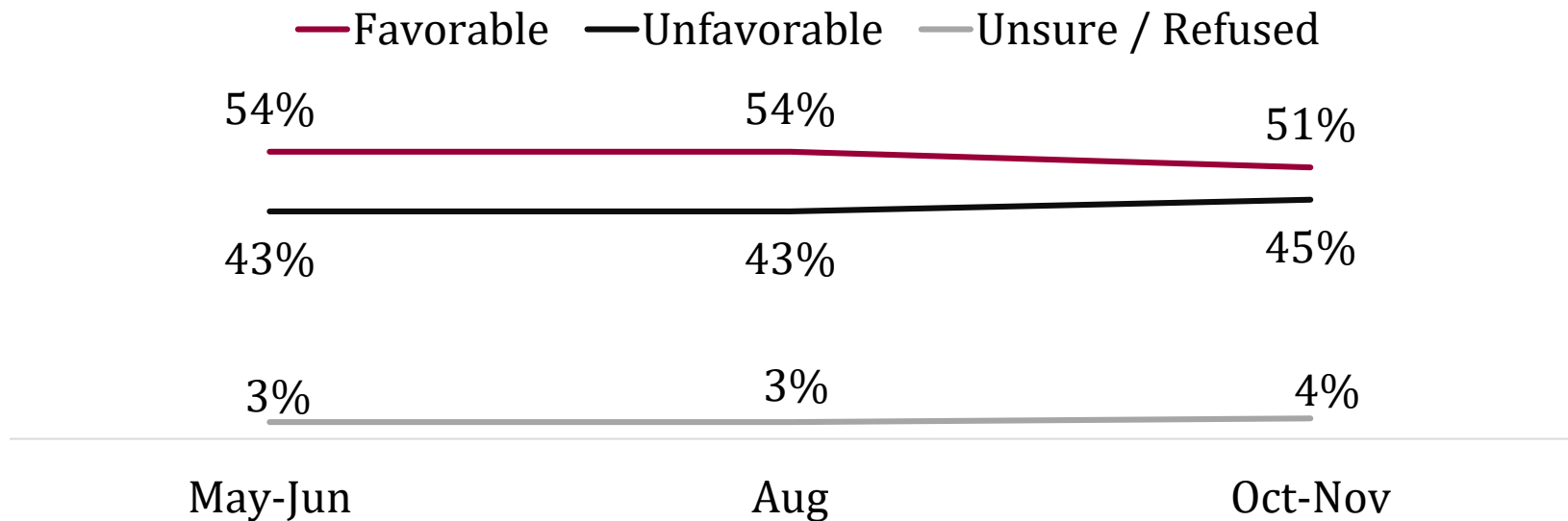
	May-Jun	Aug	Oct-Nov
Matt Bevin			
Very favorable	18%	18%	22%
Somewhat favorable	20%	23%	18%
Total favorable	37%	41%	40%
Somewhat unfavorable	11%	13%	11%
Very unfavorable	44%	39%	43%
Total unfavorable	55%	52%	53%
<i>Unfamiliar / Refused</i>	8%	8%	6%
Andy Beshear			
Very favorable	19%	19%	26%
Somewhat favorable	27%	29%	22%
Total favorable	46%	48%	48%
Somewhat unfavorable	13%	15%	13%
Very unfavorable	22%	21%	29%
Total unfavorable	34%	36%	41%
<i>Unfamiliar / Refused</i>	19%	17%	11%

Trump not a clear positive for Bevin

- Bevin tied himself to Trump very closely
- Trump favorables low relative to 2016 margin (+32)

Trump favorability not hugely positive among Kentucky voters

% who view Trump favorably and unfavorably



Trump not a clear positive

- More said Trump ties made them *less* like to vote for Bevin than more likely

More say Trump was a hindrance rather than a help to Bevin

Q: Matt Bevin is a close ally of President Trump and supports many of his policies. Do Matt Bevin's ties to President Trump make you **READ AND ROTATE?**

	May-Jun	Aug
More likely to vote for him	19%	24%
Less likely to vote for him	32%	37%
Does not make a difference	49%	38%
Don't Know / Refused (not read)	1%	1%

Question only included in waves 1 and 2

Top messages remained consistent


- Tested messages on various issues:
 - Public servant pay
 - Charter schools
 - Healthcare
 - Temperament
 - Sexual harassment
 - Coal vs clean energy
 - Chicken pox
- Public servant pay, charters were consistently top 2 messages across waves.

Central role of education dispute


- Disputes over pension bill, charter schools, budget cuts, policy changes and more.

courier journal HOME NEWS SPORTS KENTUCKY DERBY USA TODAY JOBS

Phillip M. Bailey, Courier Journal Published 3:51 p.m. ET March 21, 2018 | Updated 2:24 p.m. E



Teachers and other opponents of the bill flocked to the Capitol on Monday, March 12 for their biggest demonstration yet.



Gov. Matt Bevin continued his war of words with Kentucky teachers and their union leaders, saying state lawmakers are facing a "thug mentality" from those resisting his efforts to overhaul the state's woefully funded pension system.

The comments come on the heels of Bevin, a Republican, [trying to mend fences with public school educators](#) after calling them "selfish and short-sighted" last week for opposing the reforms.

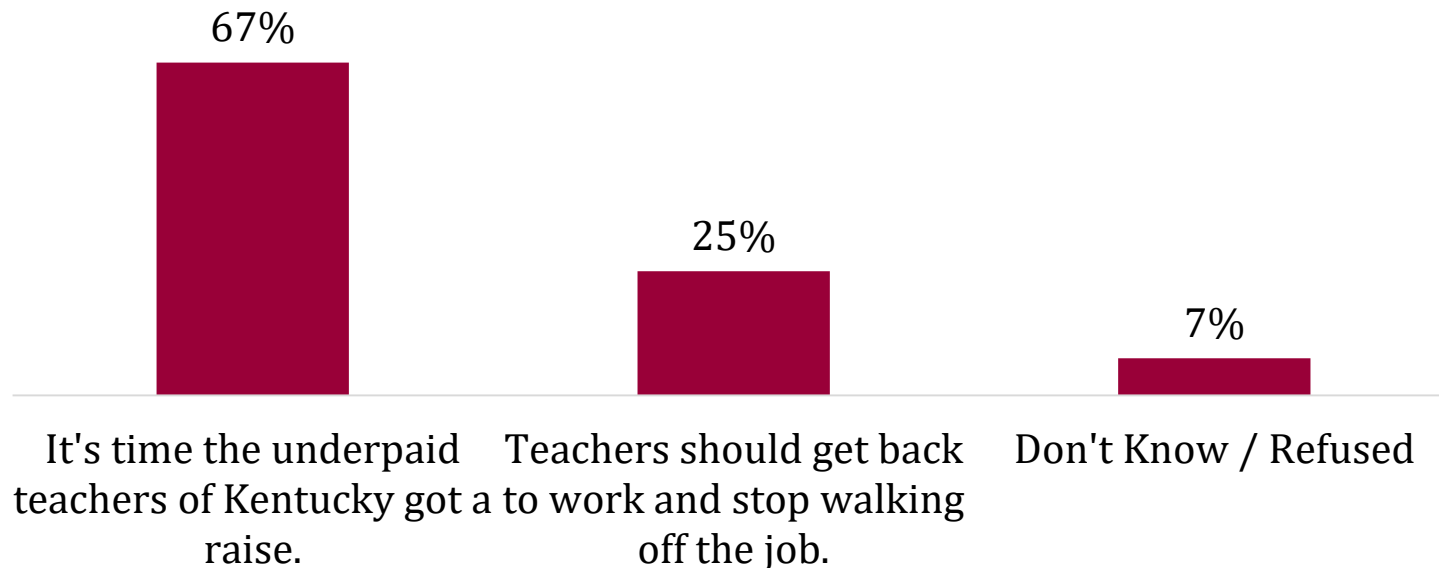
Speaking on a [Bowling Green radio station](#) Tuesday, Bevin said many GOP legislators are worried about re-election. He called attention to teachers who hoped state Sen

On education, Bevin was out of step

- Other questions throughout the polling showed this was a key issue in this contest.

Voters disagreed with the core of Bevin's approach on education

Q: Which is closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



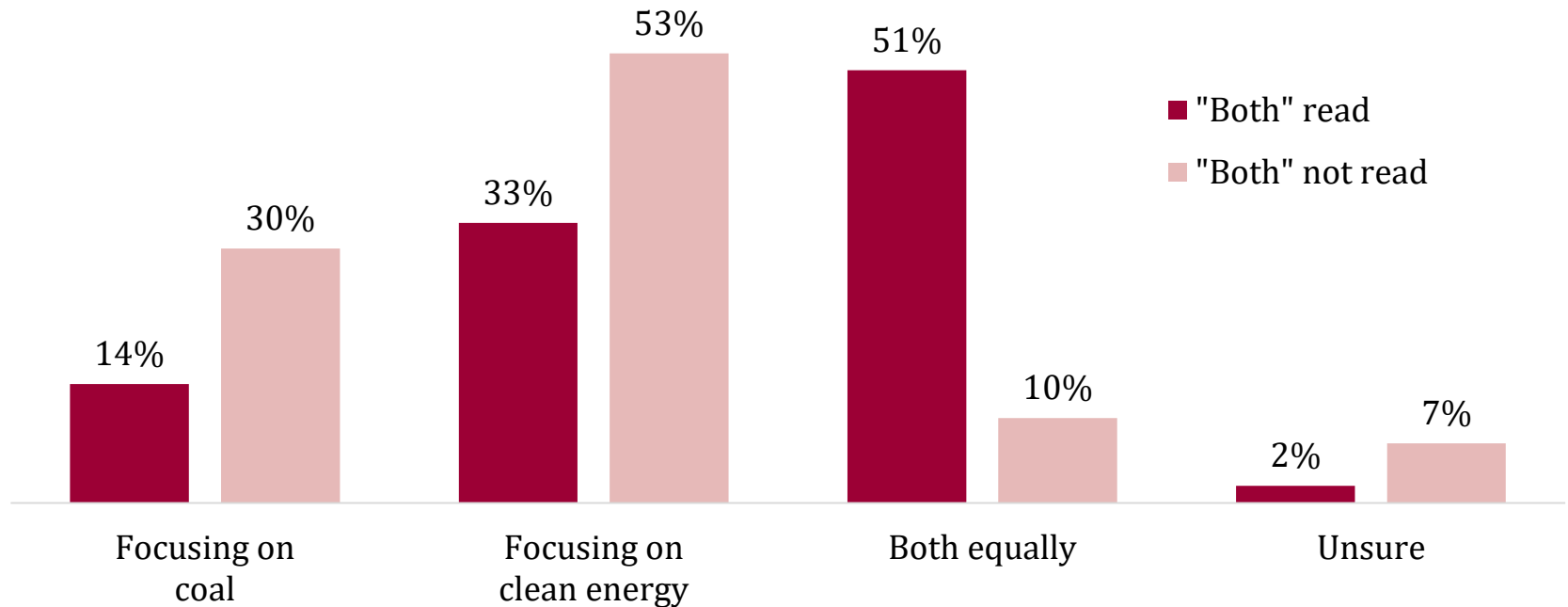
Question only asked in wave 1 (May-June)

And on energy issues too

- Voters also disagreed with Bevin on energy issues, leaning much more toward clean energy

Kentucky residents lean more toward clear energy than coal

% of phone respondents who say Kentucky should focus more on coal or clean energy, by whether "both equally" was read to them or not



Also did ranking for messages

- Surveys tested online and phone modes. In online survey, messages were rated *and* ranked in wave 3.
- Ranking showed clearer differentiation.

Public servant pay outpaces other messages in online ranking task for Bevin

% who ranked each message in terms of how concerning it is (1=most)

	Cut public servant pay	Supports charter schools	Exposed children to chicken pox	Doesn't have temperament
1	37%	24%	22%	18%
2	31%	31%	17%	21%
Total rank 1 and 2	68%	54%	39%	39%
3	19%	28%	21%	32%
4	13%	18%	40%	30%
Total rank 3 and 4	32%	46%	61%	61%

Also ranked Beshear positives

- In online ranking task for Beshear positives, public schools also came out on top in wave 3.

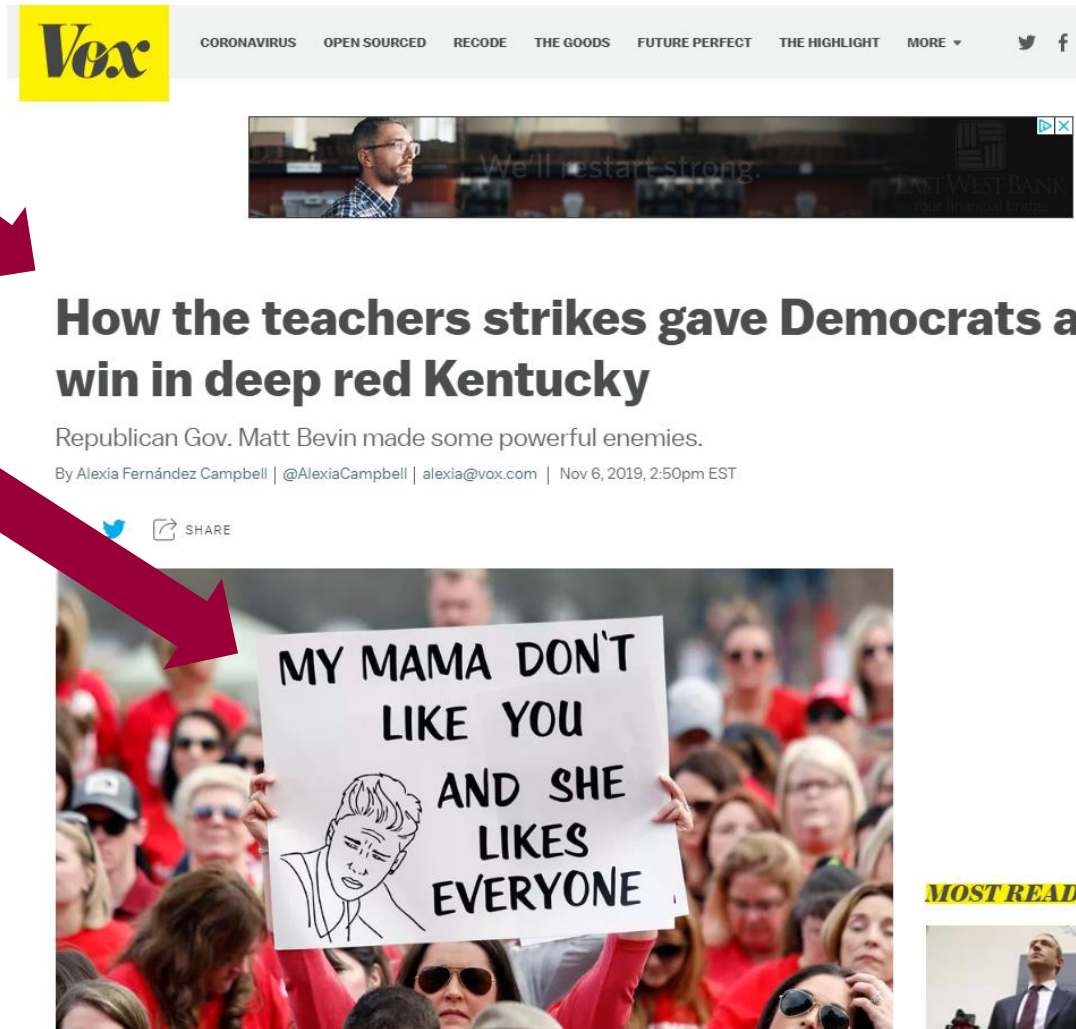
Public schools topped positive messaging for Beshear in ranking

% who ranked each message in terms of how convincing it is (1=most)

	Supports public schools	Committed to testing rape kits	No pass to pharma for opioids	Transparency in government
1	37%	28%	16%	20%
2	24%	26%	31%	19%
Total rank 1 and 2	61%	54%	47%	39%
3	23%	28%	26%	23%
4	16%	19%	27%	38%
Total rank 3 and 4	39%	46%	53%	61%

In closing

- There is something to this framing.



The screenshot shows the Vex news website. The navigation bar includes links for CORONAVIRUS, OPEN SOURCED, RECODE, THE GOODS, FUTURE PERFECT, THE HIGHLIGHT, and MORE. A video player is visible with the text "We'll restart strong." Below the video is the article title: "How the teachers strikes gave Democrats a win in deep red Kentucky". The byline reads: "Republican Gov. Matt Bevin made some powerful enemies. By Alexia Fernández Campbell | @AlexiaCampbell | alexia@vox.com | Nov 6, 2019, 2:50pm EST". A "SHARE" button is present. A large red arrow points from the top left towards the article title. Another large red arrow points from the bottom left towards a photograph of a crowd at a political rally. In the photograph, a woman in the foreground holds a white sign that reads: "MY MAMA DON'T LIKE YOU AND SHE LIKES EVERYONE". A hand-drawn sketch of a man's face is on the sign. To the right of the photograph is a "MOST READ" section with a small thumbnail image of a man in a suit.



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