

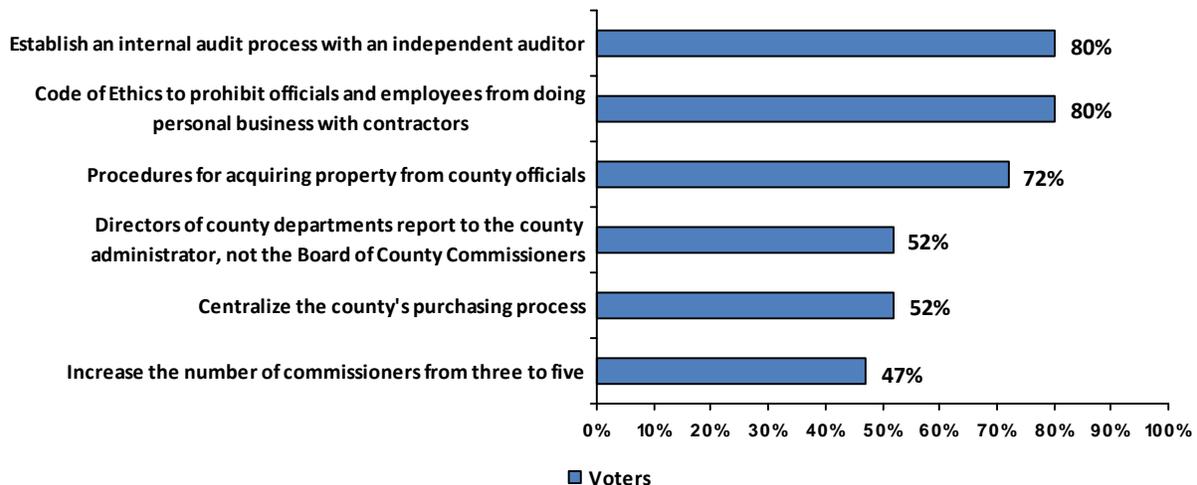
Adams County Voters Very Concerned About Corruption in County Government – Favor Reforms

Ciruli Associates Poll
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DENVER, CO. – In a recent Ciruli Associates survey, Adams County voters are very concerned (84%) about corruption in Adams County government and strongly support reforms that were enacted this spring by Adams County Commissioners. When asked about specific reforms, voters gave strong support to an independent audit (80%), prohibiting officials and employees from doing business with county contractors (80%), and strict procedures for acquiring property from county officials and employees (72%).

Summary of Reforms of County Government Strong and Somewhat Support



*Question: Specifically, let me ask you about those reforms and see if you approve or do not approve of them. As I read each reform that was adopted, please tell me if you strongly support it, somewhat support it, somewhat oppose it or strongly oppose it. If you aren't familiar with the reform or don't have an opinion, just say so.
[ROTATED]*

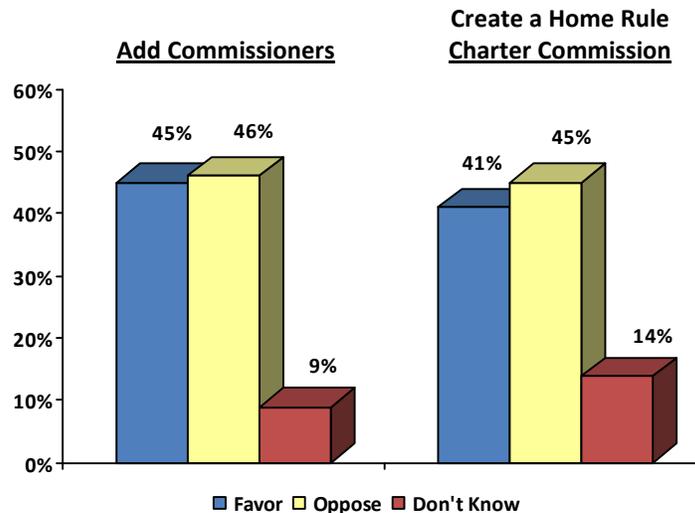
Asked their impressions about the reforms, voters felt they were a good idea and needed to be done. Many said it was overdue and asked what took so long. And, a few voters believed they need to be stronger and will need enforcement.

Ciruli Associates conducted the survey of 550 likely Adams County voters from August 15 to 18, 2011. The Adams County Board of Commissioners sponsored the survey. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.2 percentage points. A complete questionnaire is available from the Adams County Commissioners (jrobinson@adcogov.org) or Ciruli Associates (fciruli@aol.com).

Support for Adding Commissioners and Home Rule Charter

Adams County voters were asked their views on two government structural changes that would require voter approval: Expanding the county commissioner positions from three to five, and creating a county Home Rule Charter commission. Although a few Front Range counties have expanded their number of county commissioners and adopted a Home Rule Charter, Adams County voters were undecided on each idea.

Adams County Voters' Views on Adding Commissioners and a Home Rule Charter



Question: Let me ask you if you support or oppose a proposal to expand the number of Adams County commissioners from three to five. Based on what you know at this time, would you say you strongly favor expanding to five county commissioners in Adams County from the current three commissioners, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose expanding to five county commissioners? [ROTATED]

Question: Based on what you know at this time, would you say you strongly favor creating a home rule charter commission that would create a home rule charter, somewhat favor creating a commission, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose creating a home rule charter commission? [ROTATED]

The electorate divided in its response to the question of adding two commissioners (45% to 46%). The issue of adding commissioners, asked in the reform of county government question reported previously, received 47 percent support. Hence, about one-half the electorate would consider the issue and might vote for it, and about one-half are in current opposition.

Supporters of expanding the commission said they thought they would have better representation in general, and better representation in diverse areas of the county. They also felt a 5-member commission would produce more balance on the board and reduce corruption. But, opponents felt it would be more expensive and that the change was not needed. They also believed it would lead to more bureaucracy and more political infighting.

When asked what type of option they preferred for electing five commissioners, voters divided between voting for commissioners separately within five districts or voting for all five commissioners at-large, including those in districts.

A Home Rule Charter allows county voters to create a different structure of operation, including going to five commissioners or shifting some county officers from elected to appointed. After voters were read an explanation of how the process works, along with some options they could consider, a plurality rejected the idea 45 percent against to 41 percent in favor.

Supporters thought it was a good idea in general, that it gives power to the people, and that the county needs to make changes. Opponents felt it wasn't needed and was too complicated. They also saw it as a bad idea that would be too expensive and lead to more bureaucracy.

After the discussion of various aspects of a Home Rule Charter, two arguments were posed: one for and one against the concept (see statements below). A majority of voters (51%) chose the opposing statement and 41 percent chose the statement in favor.

The two statements:

Favor: A home rule charter is the kind of change we need in Adams County. We can't trust the politicians to make the changes needed. With a charter, we can put in place rules that require financial accountability, transparency, and more citizen control and involvement.

or

Oppose: A home rule charter is too much change and too complicated. It will be expensive to implement. Adams County just needs to implement the rules already proposed and elect some good officials and we can get the improvements we need.

Some of the possible options within a Home Rule Charter county were popular with voters. They especially liked campaign contribution disclosures and limits (83% "good"/"very good" idea) and creating citizen committees for issues, such as finance and elections (68%). They were cautious on having a property tax limit (50%) and disapproved of shifting some county offices from elected to appointed positions (35%).

Rating Adams County Local Government and Agencies

Adams County government was rated "somewhat" or "very" favorable by 65 percent of Adams County voters. That favorability rating compared well with other local government organizations, including voters' local library district (68% "very" and "somewhat" favorable), their town or city government (62%) and the local public school district (45%).

Eight Adams County government agencies were rated on a scale of "excellent," "good," "fair" or "poor." Voters gave the highest rating to the County Open Space Program (59% "excellent" or "good") and the lowest rating to the Social Services Department (30% "excellent" or "good"). Other agencies receiving a majority of excellent or good ratings included the County Motor Vehicle Office (57%), Public Works Department (53%) and the County Courts (53%).

Summary of County Government Agencies' Ratings

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Excellent/ Good</u>	<u>Fair/ Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Ratio Positive to Negative</u>
County Open Space Program	59%	21%	20%	2.8:1
County Motor Vehicle Office	57	37	6	1.5:1
Public Works Department	53	34	13	1.6:1
County Courts	53	23	24	2.3:1
Tri-County Health Department	48	20	32	2.4:1
County Planning and Land Use	40	33	27	1.2:1
County Jail	34	17	49	2.0:1
Social Services Department	30	35	35	(0.8:1)

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The table of government agencies' ratings shows that County Motor Vehicle had the second-highest rating. It also had the highest negative rating of a 37 percent "fair" or "poor." Also, many voters were not aware of the operations of County Courts or Tri-County Health, but the positive-to-negative ratios were among the highest of agencies tested. Even the County Jail had a high ratio, although nearly one-half of the population couldn't rate it. Both County Planning and Public Works had high negatives (33% and 34% "fair" or "poor," respectively), giving them low positive-to-negative ratios.

Only the Social Services Department had a negative ratio in the positive-to-negative rating, meaning it had more low ratings of "fair" or "poor" than high ratings. About one-third of the voters couldn't rate it. The poor ratings may reflect how voters' regard social services' overall function, rather than their evaluation of the agency's performance.

Rating Adams County Local Offices

Seven elected offices within Adams County government were evaluated on a rating scale of "favorable" to "unfavorable." The ratio of positive-to-negative is generally higher than the county agencies just reviewed, and most county offices with elected officials received lower "unfavorable" ratings than agencies were given "fair" and "poor" ratings.

The offices with the highest favorable ratings and positive-to-negative ratios were the County Clerk and Records Office and the Sheriff's Office, with nearly two-thirds of voters rating them favorable and ratios of positive-to-negative reaching 5-to-1 (see following table).

Summary of County Government Offices' Ratings

<u>County Office</u>	<u>Very/ Somewhat Favorable</u>	<u>Very/ Somewhat Unfavorable</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Ratio Positive to Negative</u>
Adams County Clerk and Recorder Office	65%	11%	25%	5.9:1
Adams County Sheriff's Office	64	13	23	4.9:1
Adams County District Attorney	51	12	36	4.2:1
Adams County Treasurer's Office	48	16	37	3.0:1
Adams County Coroner	42	7	52	6.0:1
Board of Adams County Commissioners	38	28	34	1.4:1
Adams County Assessor's Office	36	38	26	(0.9:1)

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The two groups at the bottom of the favorability ratings, the Board of County Commissioners and the Assessor's Office, received low positive ratings and higher negative ratings. Both have been in the news recently related to corruption accusations and controversies. The County Assessor received very controversial news coverage as the poll was in the field and, in fact, the office received a negative ratio.

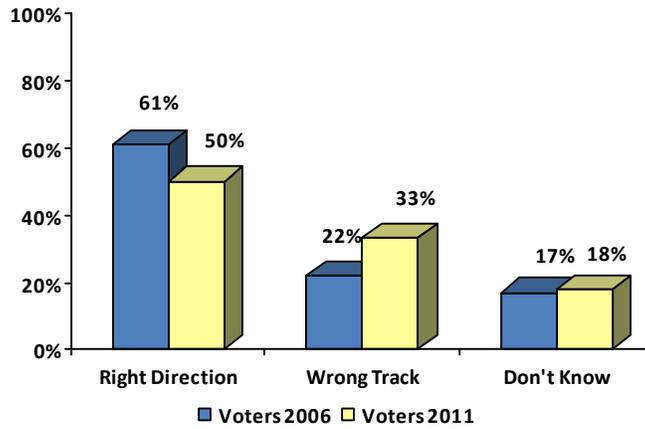
The County Coroner had the highest ratio of positive-to-negative rating, but one-half the voters could not rate the office.

The District Attorney and County Treasurer are in the middle of the ratings, with between 3- to 4-to-1 ratios of positive-to-negative.

Direction of County and Top Issues

A similar countywide survey was conducted for Adams County in 2006 (500 sample, ± 4.4 percentage points). A comparison of voters' sense of the county's direction measures about a 10-point drop in a standard "right direction/wrong track" question that interviewers ask at the beginning of most Ciruli Associates public opinion polls.

**Adams County
Right Direction/Wrong Track
2006 and 2011**



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The “right direction/wrong track” sentiment tends to reflect the sentiments toward major issues that voters believe are influencing the county. The poor economy is strongly influencing voters’ viewpoints, but so is their evaluation of how government is performing.

For example, citizens’ ratings on right direction/wrong track questions regarding national affairs currently measure in the low teens, a reflection of both the economy and the general disapproval of Washington, D.C. gridlock and partisanship.

Additionally, comparing the 2006 and 2011 poll question asking the top issue that voters want “county public officials to deal with” today, the economy, education and corruption were named the first, second and third top issues. In 2006, education, growth and traffic/congestion were rated the top issues (see table below).

Hence, the economy and corruption have replaced growth, traffic and illegal immigration as top issues on Adams County citizens’ minds that now affect their sense of happiness with the direction of the county.

**Adams County
Top Issues for Public Officials in County**

<u>Top Issue</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2006</u>
Economy/jobs	18%	3%
Education	14	17
Corruption/ethics in office	12	--
Taxes	9	6
Traffic/congestion	8	11
Crime/violence	3	7
Illegal immigration	2	7
Growth	2	12

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Education, mostly referencing local public K-12 schools, is a perennial concern among voters both because the public values education and they don't believe it's performing well. In this survey, public schools received the lowest local government favorability rating with the highest negative and the lowest positive-to-negative ratio.

Sample Description

The largest group of surveyed voters resided in Thornton (24%), with Westminster (18%) and Northglenn (10%) in second and third place. One-fifth of the population lived in unincorporated areas.

One-quarter of voters are new to the county, having lived there less than 10 years. More than one-half are either native to the area (6%) or resided in the county more than 20 years (50%).

Likely voters were registered 43 percent Democrat, 35 percent Republican and 20 percent unaffiliated. But, in terms of voters' self-identity, the largest bloc described themselves independent (38%). About three-quarters of the voters said they were either Democrat, Republican or Independent, with the final one-quarter only weakly identifying with a party. Regardless of party, only 21 percent said their political philosophy was liberal. The largest bloc of Adams County likely voters described themselves as "conservative" (45%), with more than one-half of them saying they were "very conservative" (23%) versus "moderate leaning conservative" (22%).

A majority of likely voters have a high school degree (31%) or some college (26%), and a plurality are 65 years old or older (39%). The likely electorate in November will average over 55 years of age.

Most voters said they have access to the Internet (80%) and 39 percent said they had visited the Adams County website in the last year. Overall, 16 percent of voters said online sources provided them "most of your local government news." Television (TV channels 2, 4, 7, 9 and 13) dominated local news sources, with 53 percent of voters citing it, while the *Denver Post* was in second place with 28 percent. When asked about newspapers, the *Denver Post* was referenced by 58 percent of voters, but 38 percent said they read no newspaper regularly. A small percentage of voters use local weekly newspapers, such as the *Northglenn-Thornton Sentinel* (8%), the *Westminster Window* (6%) or the *Brighton Standard-Blade* (5%).

Fifty-two percent of the likely voters were female, 84 percent were Anglo, 8 percent Hispanic and 2 percent African-American, and one-half (52%) had incomes of less than \$80,000.

Seventy-two people were contacted on cell phones. Three-quarters said they "always" vote in local elections and 78 percent would "definitely" vote in November 2011's off-year election.

Conclusion

Adams County voters, like citizens throughout the country, are concerned about the economy. But, Adams County voters are concerned about corruption and ethics in local offices and expressed a desire to deal with it. Adams County government in general had a positive

favorability rating, but a few county offices were given very low ratings, and one, the Assessor's Office, received a net negative rating.

Voters were very supportive of most of the reforms implemented thus far to deal with corruption and/or the appearance of corruption, but some skepticism remains that follow-up and enforcement will continue.

Of the two major structural reforms available to counties, local voters had mixed views. The public is closely divided on the question of adding two county commissioners to the current three. Of the nearly one-half who said they favored it, about one-quarter were strongly in favor. However, a similar amount were strongly against.

Voters were less supportive of the concept of a Home Rule Charter, along with the host of possible changes it might entail and the need to authorize a charter commission. The concept drew more passion against than in favor from the voters.

In general, voters support current reforms and want follow-up, and the next election for county offices will likely see some change in political officeholders based on the corruption issue.