

Just 49% say Idaho is headed in right direction

That's down from 70% in '04. BSU's public policy survey also found independents now outnumber Republicans.

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Economic and job frustration have Idahoans worried about the state's overall direction and turning away from the major

political parties, according to Boise State's Idaho Public Policy Survey released Tuesday.

The findings did not come as a surprise to many lawmakers, who heard similar sentiment before November's elections.

"We know that people are tired of the political bickering, tired of the political parties and see the parties as a barrier to appropriate public policy," said Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert. "Idahoans have always had an affinity toward being independent."

In the 525-person survey conducted be-

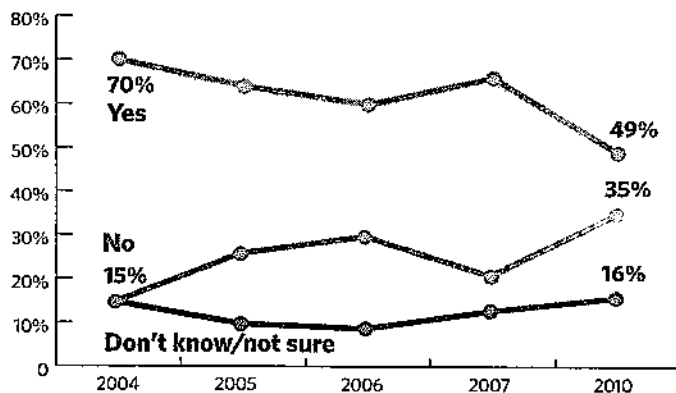
tween mid-November and early January, more Idahoans identified themselves as independents than Republicans — for the first time in the survey's more than 20-year history. The survey had a standard error of plus or minus 5 percent and a 95 percent confidence level.

Just 49 percent said they thought the

See **BSU SURVEY, A6**

SEE WHAT IDAHOANS THINK ABOUT 3 TOP ISSUES in results from the survey. **A6**

IS THE STATE HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?*



*No surveys were conducted in 2008 or 2009.

BSU SURVEY

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state was moving in the right direction — a massive drop from the 70 percent who thought so in 2004.

"People are frustrated with their government and they tend to broad-brush all levels of government together," said Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint. "They're profoundly worried about what's happening at the federal level ... There's an underlying angst out there."

The underlying concern is the economy, which 33 percent named the most important issue facing Idaho today. Another 17 percent tagged jobs as the top issue. Some 65 percent said they had delayed a major purchase.

"People don't like the direction the state is headed in because of the economic conditions," said Cameron, Senate Finance Committee chairman. "It still doesn't feel right to us."

Democrats, who are outnumbered 85-20 in the Idaho Legislature and hold no statewide offices, see additional reasons for the poll numbers.

"There is a level of concern out there ... about where the current leadership is taking us and whether we're making appropriate investments in the future," said Rep. Brian Cronin, D-Boise.

He said it would be premature to conclude that public opinion may be swinging toward the Democrats, though, especially since Republicans swept statewide elections in November, just weeks before this survey was conducted.

"The survey certainly points to an opportunity for Demo-

crats. It reaffirms a lot of what we've been saying in terms of broadening the discussion about education and not simply cutting everything," Cronin said. "It's up to us to make the case that we have better alternatives."

The poll results also show a conflicted electorate on health care, immigration and, to a lesser degree, on taxes. Though 75 percent said budget cuts have affected the quality of education, 56 percent said Idaho should not raise the sales tax to close the overall budget gap.

Sen. Patti Anne Lodge, R-Huston, said she would not support a tax increase because too many Idahoans are barely making it. She said hard-working citizens are angry at what they see as a system that rewards those who do not work over those who do.

"Young people are disillusioned by what they see as inequities in how they're out there working and trying to pay for things and seeing their neighbor remain on unemployment," she said. "I haven't met anybody who isn't frustrated."

Schools Superintendent Tom Luna, whose proposed overhaul of public education has become the debate of the session, said despite this poll's numbers, lawmakers got a different message from Idahoans last fall.

"On Nov. 2, I think 400,000 people participated in a poll. And they had a very clear choice," Luna said. "The voters overwhelmingly sent the message to the Legislature, which I think is driving the decisions that are being made today, that they do not want their taxes raised in order to solve budget issues."

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