

Scott Walker Leads Conservative Republicans

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker is the clear favorite of conservative voters as he readies an expected bid for the Republican Party's presidential nomination in 2016, according to a *Reuters/Ipsos* poll.

Walker has gained little traction among the moderate voters who account for the majority of the party, the poll shows. But his strength on the right gives him a good base of support, analysts said.

"It's never bad to be the most conservative guy in a Republican primary fight—he could win the nomination that way. The question is can he do so in a way that does not alienate moderates?" said David Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

Walker and Texas Senator Ted Cruz can each claim about a quarter of the most conservative party members, the poll shows. While ardent conservatives only account for 1 in 10 Republican voters, they are more likely to vote in primary contests and take an active role in politics. He also wins a large share of conservative-leaning voters who are less inclined to see every issue in terms of black and white.

Overall, 11 percent of Republicans say Walker is their pick to be the party's nominee for the November 2016 election, putting him in third place behind former Florida Governor Jeb Bush and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.

Walker supporters said they admired his willingness to take on public-sector labor unions and govern as an uncompromising conservative in a politically competitive state.

"I think he did a commendable job fighting against the unions,

I think the unions are just out of control,” said poll respondent Don Oliphant, 49, a prison guard from Lewes, Delaware.

Pros and Cons

Reuters surveyed 2,852 self-identified Republicans over the month of May and asked them about topics like health care and foreign policy as well as which candidate they liked best.

The results provide insight into an electorate that has been sharply divided over issues like immigration and upended by the grass-roots Tea Party movement. The online poll among all Republicans has a credibility interval of 2.1 percent. The credibility interval ranges from 3.2 percent to 7.1 percent for smaller groups broken out by the poll.

Though Walker does best among the most conservative voters, he also does well among those who are open to compromise on some issues. For example, he gets the support of 20 percent of those who have no interest in renewable energy but believe that not all illegal immigrants should be deported, 6 points ahead of any other candidate.

Walker gets the backing of only 7 percent of moderates, ranking below six other Republican candidates.

Wisconsin resident Duane Feustel, 58, said he supported Walker’s fight against the unions but didn’t like how budget cuts affected his wife’s job helping people with disabilities.

“He’s done what he’s done for Wisconsin – there’s pros and cons to it,” said Feustel, an unemployed scrap-metal worker who backs Bush at this point in the race.

Walker’s path to the nomination, if successful, would mark a shift for a party that in past elections has nominated candidates who draw their support from moderates, like Mitt Romney in 2012 and John McCain in 2008.

Republican strategists said Walker could pick up more support among moderates once he formally enters the race and voters start paying closer attention. But several questioned whether he will hold up to scrutiny, noting that he has already fumbled questions on evolution, religion and foreign policy.

“People are still projecting a lot on Scott Walker,” said Craig Robinson, a former political director for the Iowa Republican Party. “He’s everyone’s favorite—we’re not kicking the tires yet.”

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