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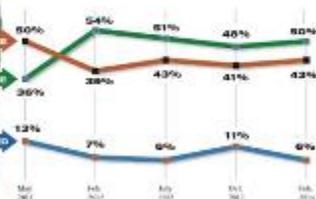
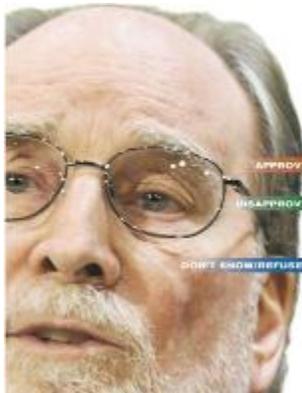
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## Abercrombie's rivals close in

A poll shows the governor's vulnerabilities in both the primary and general elections

By Derrick DePledge

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Voters are deeply ambivalent about Gov. Neil Abercrombie, a new Hawaii Poll shows, an opening that breathes

unexpected life into his political challengers.

Despite the state's economic turnaround and record budget surplus, Abercrombie's job approval rating stands at 43 percent, and just 45 percent of voters interviewed had a favorable opinion of him.

Abercrombie holds a single-digit lead over state Sen. David Ige in the Democratic primary for governor, a surprise given that Ige has raised little money and many voters have never heard of or do not know enough about the state senator.

Even more surprising, former Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona, who has yet to formally launch his Republican campaign, led both Abercrombie and Ige in hypothetical November general election matchups.

Thirty-nine percent of voters said they would consider voting for former Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann if he were to run for governor as an independent.

Rebecca Ward, president of Ward Research Inc., which conducted the Hawaii Poll for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and Hawaii News Now, said the poll results are more a reflection on Abercrombie than the strength of his potential rivals.

"When you look at it all together, it looks like voters are expressing unhappiness with Abercrombie and a willingness to vote for anyone running against him," Ward said.

The job approval and favorable ratings and hypothetical general election matchups were based on telephone land-line and cellphone interviews with 642 voters statewide from Feb. 1 to 11. The margin of error was 3.9 percentage points.

The poll of the Democratic primary for governor was taken among 528 primary voters. The margin of error was 4.3 percentage points.

A closer look inside the findings suggests that many voters were sending a message about Abercrombie, who nonetheless still appears to have a solid base among Demo-crats for his re-election.

Abercrombie led Ige by 47 percent to 38 percent in the primary, with 14 percent undecided. The governor was up 53 percent to 33 percent, however, among voters who usually back Demo-crats.

Fifty-three percent of Demo-crats also had a favorable opinion of the governor.

The same stark racial and ethnic disparity found in the Hawaii Poll of the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate between U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz and U.S. Rep. Colleen Hana-busa showed up in the primary for governor. Abercrombie, who is white, was up 62 percent to 25 percent over Ige among whites. Ige, who is Japa-nese-American, led 54 percent to 31 percent among Japa-nese-Americans.

Ige also did slightly better than Abercrombie with seniors and the wealthy and demonstrably better among independents and Republicans. Given that independents and Republicans later said they would vote for Aiona over both Demo-crats, the support for Ige was likely a protest against the governor.

"We are pleased with the governor's strong lead in the recent poll results," William Kaneko, Abercrombie's campaign manager, said in a statement. "During the past three years, the governor exercised sound fiscal stewardship that laid the foundation to economic and social prosperity. We now have an \$850 million budget surplus and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Our economy continues to grow after years of stagnation and recession. It took strength and leadership to make the tough choices that led to this positive turning point for Hawaii."

Ige's main challenge is name recognition. With just six months before the August primary, 38 percent of voters had never heard of the state senator, and 23 percent had heard of him but did not know enough to form an opinion.

Ige had raised about \$150,000 through the end of last year, compared with Abercrombie's \$3.8 million, so he has to rely on news media coverage and retail, grass-roots events unless he gathers the money necessary to reach voters at the wholesale level.

"It's obviously a race," Ige said. "It's close. We do know that there are many voters that I haven't met yet, so we have a huge upside."

Ige said voters want change.

"The fact that less than half of the people approve of the governor's performance obviously is very, very encouraging to us," he said.

The Hawaii Poll's most remarkable findings were about Aiona. The former lieutenant governor, who lost by double digits to Abercrombie in 2010, is just starting to raise money and is still building a campaign organization.

Yet Aiona led Abercrombie 48 percent to 40 percent and Ige 51 percent to 34 percent. Fifty-eight percent

of voters had a favorable opinion of the Republican, including 50 percent of Demo-crats.

"To me what it is is a confirmation that the people of Hawaii are just not happy with what's going on with the administration," Aiona said.

Aiona discounted the idea that the poll results were merely a protest against Abercrombie.

"I say it's what you call voter remorse," he said.

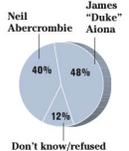
Hannemann, who lost badly to Abercrombie in 2010 and U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard in 2012, has hinted he could run for governor as an independent or Republican. The former mayor's favorable rating was 45 percent, the same as Abercrombie's.

Dante Carpenter, chairman of the Demo-cratic Party of Hawaii, said he is not overly concerned about Aiona's showing in the poll or by voter apprehension with Abercrombie, who, as the state's chief executive, has an influence on the party's political brand.

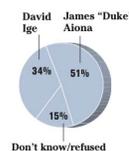
"I think this is the usual pre-election jitters," he said.

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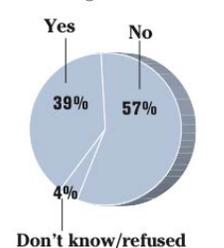
If the general election for governor were held today, and the candidates were Neil Abercrombie and James "Duke" Aiona, who would you vote for?



If the general election were held today, and the candidates were David Ige and James "Duke" Aiona, who would you vote for?

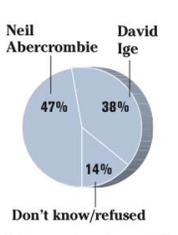


If Mufi Hannemann runs for governor as an independent, are you likely to consider voting for him?



Poll was conducted among 642 voters statewide by telephone (landlines and cellphones) Feb. 1-11 by Ward Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

If the Democratic primary for governor were held today, and the candidates were Neil Abercrombie and David Ige, who would you vote for?



Poll was conducted among 528 Democratic primary voters statewide by telephone (landlines and cellphones) Feb. 1-11 by Ward Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.3 percentage points. Numbers do not total 100 percent because of rounding.