

TULCHIN RESEARCH

To: Interested Parties

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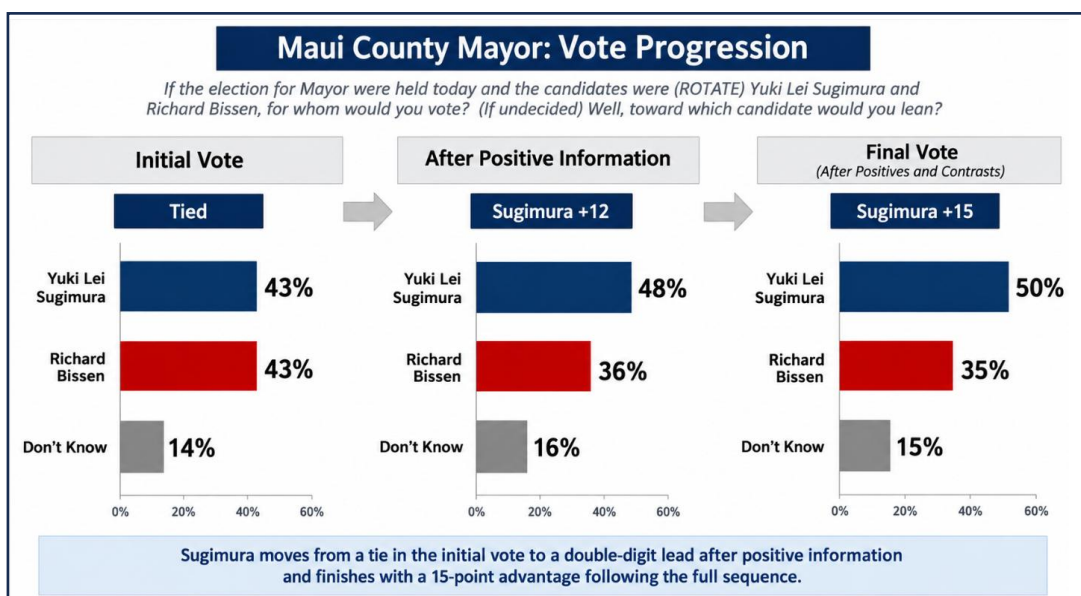
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New Poll Shows Maui Mayor's Race Deadlocked at Outset, with Significant Movement During Simulated Campaign

A recent Tulchin Research survey of likely November 2026 general election voters in Maui County finds an initially deadlocked and wide-open race for Mayor between Yuki Lei Sugimura and incumbent Mayor Richard Bissen. The two candidates begin tied at 43%, with neither holding an advantage and 14% of voters undecided. The survey's simulated campaign exercises, however, produce substantial movement in Sugimura's direction. After voters receive positive information about the candidates, Sugimura moves into a double-digit lead and finishes the full simulation with majority support (50%) to Bissen's 35%. The research also identifies several distinct positive themes surrounding Sugimura's record and agenda, as well as contrasts involving Bissen's management of county government, Maui's recovery, and his political record.

The Race Begins Deadlocked but Moves Substantially During the Simulated Campaign

At the outset, the race for Maui County Mayor is evenly divided. Sugimura and Bissen each receive 43% of the vote, while 14% of voters remain undecided. The result represents a competitive starting point compared to May survey research, when Sugimura held a 47% to 33% advantage over Bissen. The simulated campaign produces significant movement. After voters receive positive information about the candidates, Sugimura's support increases to 48% while Bissen falls to 36%, giving Sugimura a 12-point advantage. Following the complete positive and contrast sequence, Sugimura reaches 50% while Bissen receives 35%, resulting in a 15-point margin. These results demonstrate that while the race begins highly competitive, voters remain responsive to additional information about both candidates and their records.



Sugimura Has Several Distinct Ways to Introduce Her Record and Priorities

The research identifies multiple elements of Sugimura's record and agenda that provide voters with additional information about the kind of leadership she would bring to the Mayor's office, with specific themes aligning well with distinct audiences and delivery channels.

- **Broad Broadcast / TV (All Voters):** One of the clearest themes centers on water and local control, including Sugimura's role in questioning a proposed agreement with a mainland company involving Maui's water supply and her emphasis on keeping major resource decisions accountable to local communities. Because of its broad, nonpartisan resonance, this message serves as a strong anchor for mass-reach communication across broadcast and TV.

WATER/LOCAL CONTROL

When Maui County considered a nearly \$100 million deal with a private mainland company to drill wells in Kula and sell water to the county, Yuki demanded a financial analysis and brought residents into the discussion. The Water Department later dropped the proposal. Yuki will protect Maui's water, keep costs down for ratepayers, preserve local control, and make sure communities have a real voice before major decisions about our resources are made.

- **Targeted Mail and Digital (Moderates & Conservatives):** Her record on public safety and first responders provides another distinct component, highlighting support for police, firefighters, 911 dispatchers, and emergency response. Housing provides an additional substantive contrast. Sugimura's opposition to Bill 9 is paired in the research with a broader argument for housing solutions that increase supply without jeopardizing local jobs, small businesses, county revenues, or essential services. Her affordability agenda further reinforces that focus through housing, property-tax relief, childcare, and local economic opportunity—delivering a compelling case for moderate and conservative voters via targeted mail and digital programs.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Yuki believes everyone deserves to feel safe in their community. She has supported funding to recruit police officers, retain experienced 911 dispatchers, and provide firefighters and first responders with the resources they need, while also passing tougher measures to deter drunk driving. Yuki will support local law enforcement, strengthen emergency response, crack down on crime, and make sure police, firefighters, and dispatchers have the staffing and tools they need to keep Maui communities safe.

REAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS/BILL 9

Maui's housing crisis needs real solutions that actually deliver homes without sacrificing local jobs, small businesses, and essential services. Yuki opposed Bill 9 because it could cost Maui jobs and millions in tax revenue while falling far short of the housing it promised. More than 6,000 vacation rentals were supposed to become long-term homes, but proposed changes could leave only about 1,500. Yuki will focus on getting housing built faster without putting Maui families and the local economy at risk.

- **Targeted Mail and Digital (Progressives):** The research also includes a broader values-oriented description of Sugimura’s positions on abortion rights, LGBTQ rights, health care, environmental protection, and national political issues. Deployed through targeted digital and direct mail, these frames effectively mobilize progressive voters.

VALUES/PARTISAN

Yuki shares our values. She supports a woman’s right to choose, LGBTQ rights, clean air and water, and access to quality health care for everyone. Yuki will stand up to Donald Trump and MAGA Republicans when they attack our rights and our way of life, and fight back against reckless policies that are raising costs for working families while protecting Maui’s environment and making life here more affordable.

Together, these themes provide different ways for voters to understand Sugimura’s priorities across channels, while maintaining an overarching focus on local control, affordability, public safety, and Maui’s quality of life.

Information About Bissen’s Record Raises Questions About Management, Recovery, and Political Leadership

- **Targeted Mail and Digital (Moderates, Conservatives, and Sugimura Base Voters):** Some of the most prominent information involves the functioning of county government, including questions surrounding Bissen’s leadership during and after the Lahaina wildfires. Separate information about the recovery process focuses on delays in rebuilding, confusion surrounding permits, and the pace at which assistance reached families following the fires. Delivering this critique through targeted mail and digital effectively moves moderates, conservatives, and voters already leaning toward Sugimura who prioritize core governmental competence.

FAILED RECOVERY/PERMITS

Nearly three years after the Lahaina fire, Bissen’s administration was still failing to get Front Street rebuilt. The County publicly claimed businesses had received permits and commercial construction was underway, but not one recovery building permit had actually been issued for a fire-destroyed Front Street property. The County later acknowledged that what it had called permits were actually other approvals, while business owners were still waiting to rebuild.

- **Targeted Mail and Digital (Progressives and Liberals):** The research also presents voters with information about Bissen’s political relationships and his administration’s proposed agreements involving federal law enforcement. These include his longstanding connections to Republican political figures as well as proposed agreements involving Homeland Security Investigations and the FBI that raised concerns about the role of local law enforcement in federal immigration enforcement. These partisan and ICE-related contrasts are well-suited for targeted digital and direct mail aimed squarely at progressive and liberal constituencies.

PARTISAN/REPUBLICAN

Bissen has spent his career closely tied to Republican political interests. Republican Governor Linda Lingle appointed him to powerful state positions, nominated him to be a judge, donated thousands to his mayoral campaign, and is backing his re-election today. Bissen has taken thousands more from donors who have heavily funded MAGA Republican candidates.

PARTISAN/ICE

Bissen's administration sought an agreement with ICE's Homeland Security Investigations to federally designate Maui police officers and require them to follow HSI directives when using federal enforcement powers. His administration later pushed an FBI task-force agreement that would put Maui officers under federal supervision. Amid fears local police could be drawn into Trump's immigration crackdown, the County Council unanimously rejected it.

Together, these contrasts give voters additional information about Bissen's tenure across several dimensions—including management of county government, Maui's recovery, and his broader political record—while providing a clear strategic roadmap for message delivery and voter targeting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey finds a Maui mayoral race that begins completely even but moves considerably over the course of the simulated campaign. Sugimura and Bissen start tied at 43%, before Sugimura moves to a 48% to 36% advantage following positive information and finishes the full simulation ahead 50% to 35%.

The research also identifies several distinct themes surrounding the two candidates. Information about Sugimura emphasizes local control of Maui's water, public safety and first responders, housing and affordability, and her broader values and priorities. Information about Bissen centers on the management of county government, wildfire recovery and rebuilding, and aspects of his political record. Together, the findings show an electorate that begins evenly divided but remains highly responsive as voters learn more about the candidates and their records.

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Survey Methodology: *The findings in this memo are based on a survey of 400 likely November 2026 general election voters in Maui County, conducted August 19–24, 2026. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 4.39 percentage points. The survey was administered using a multi-modal approach, including landline and cellphone interviews as well as online data collection via email and text-to-web.*