

To: Interested Parties

From: Ben Tulchin, Corey O'Neil & Corey Teter; Tulchin Research

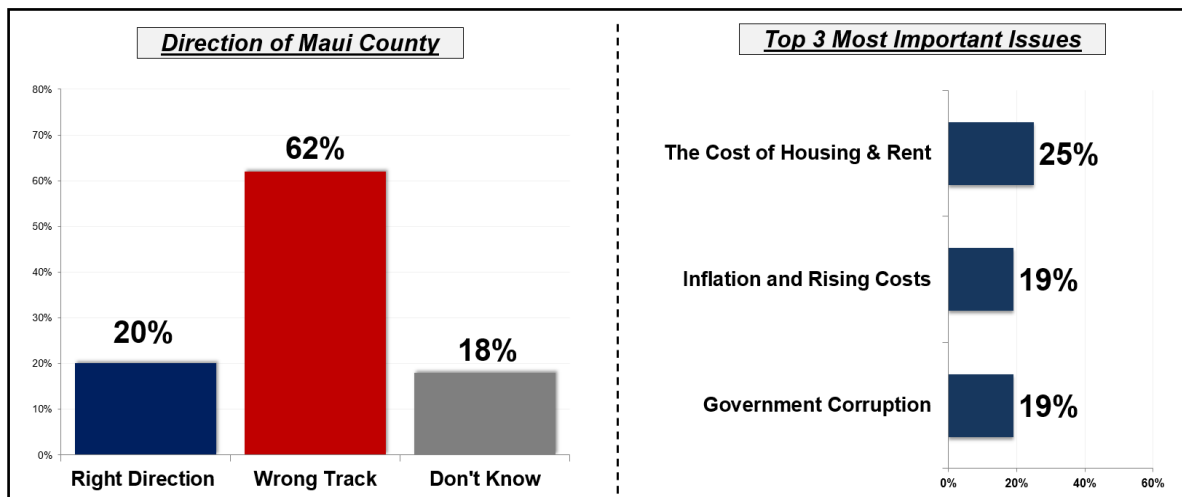
May 22, 2026

Poll Shows Yuki Lei Sugimura in Strong Position in Race for Maui Mayor

A new survey of likely Maui County primary voters finds Vice-Chair of the Maui County Council Yuki Lei Sugimura entering the 2026 race for Maui Mayor from a position of growing strength against incumbent Mayor Richard Bissen. The poll shows voters increasingly frustrated with the direction of Maui County and concerned about affordability, the economy, and government accountability, creating a difficult environment for the incumbent mayor. Against this backdrop, Sugimura has not only opened an early lead over Bissen in the mayoral race, but has expanded her advantage since last fall, driven by a stronger personal profile and a campaign that reflects the concerns shaping the electorate.

Voter Frustration Creates a Difficult Environment for the Incumbent Bissen

The poll finds voters increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of Maui, creating a challenging political environment for incumbent Mayor Richard Bissen. Nearly two-thirds of likely primary voters (62%) say the county is on the “wrong track,” compared to just 20% who believe it is headed in the right direction. These frustrations are driven largely by concerns about affordability and confidence in county government. The cost of housing and rent ranks as the top issue facing voters, followed closely by inflation and rising costs, while concerns about corruption in government also emerge as a major issue, reinforcing broader dissatisfaction with county leadership and the status quo.

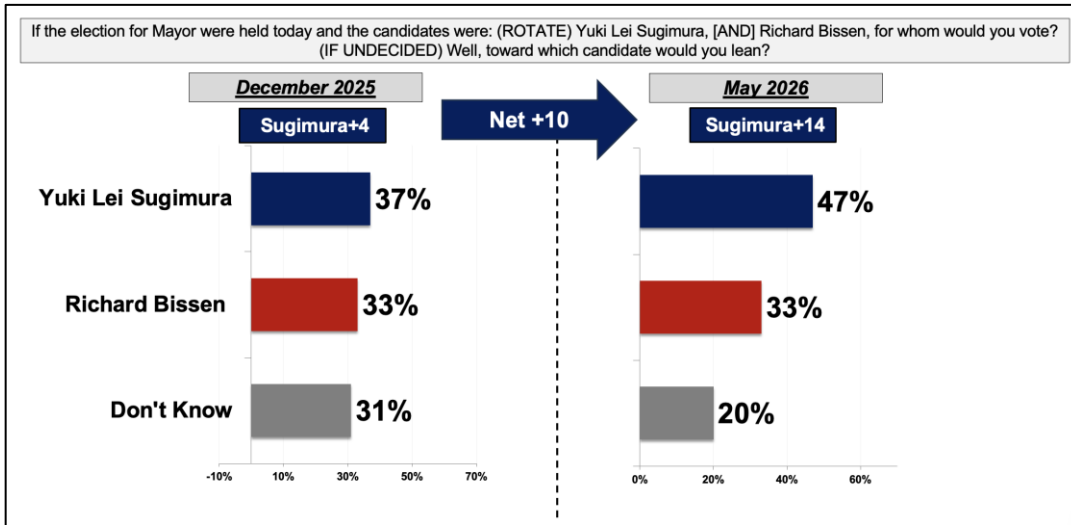


Sugimura Leads Bissen and Has Expanded Her Advantage Since Last Fall

Against this backdrop of economic frustration and dissatisfaction with county leadership, Sugimura has opened a clear lead over incumbent Mayor Richard Bissen in the race for Maui Mayor. In a head-to-head matchup between the two candidates, the poll finds Sugimura leading Bissen by fourteen points, 47% to 33%, while one in five voters (20%) remain undecided.

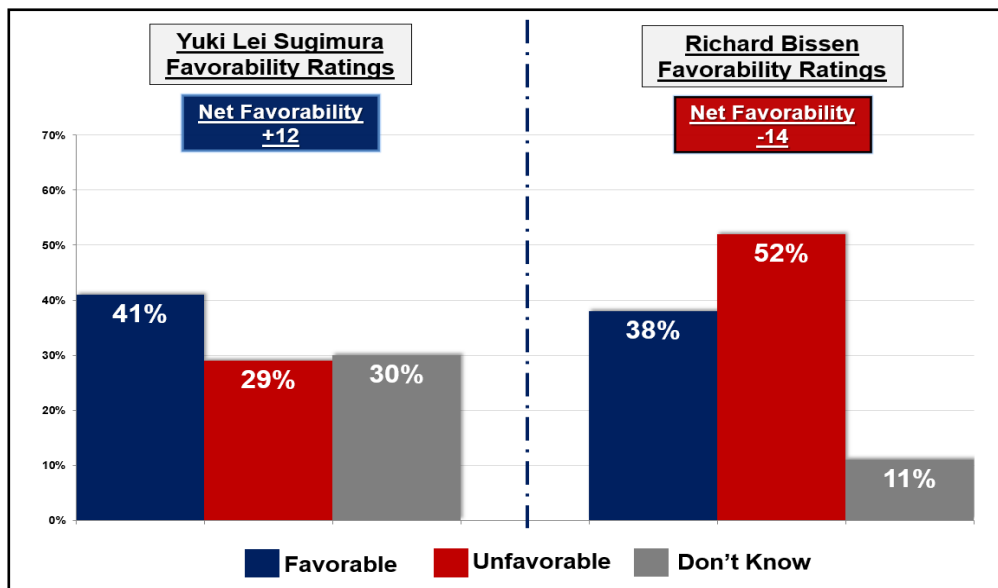
Notably, these findings also show Sugimura’s position in the race has strengthened significantly over time. When Tulchin Research first tested a hypothetical head-to-head matchup between Sugimura and Bissen in Fall 2025, Sugimura held a narrow four-point advantage, leading Bissen 37% to 33%, while nearly one-third of voters (31%) remained undecided. Since then, her lead has grown substantially, fueled both by gains in her own support and by Bissen’s continued inability to expand his coalition of support.

Horserace for Maui Mayor



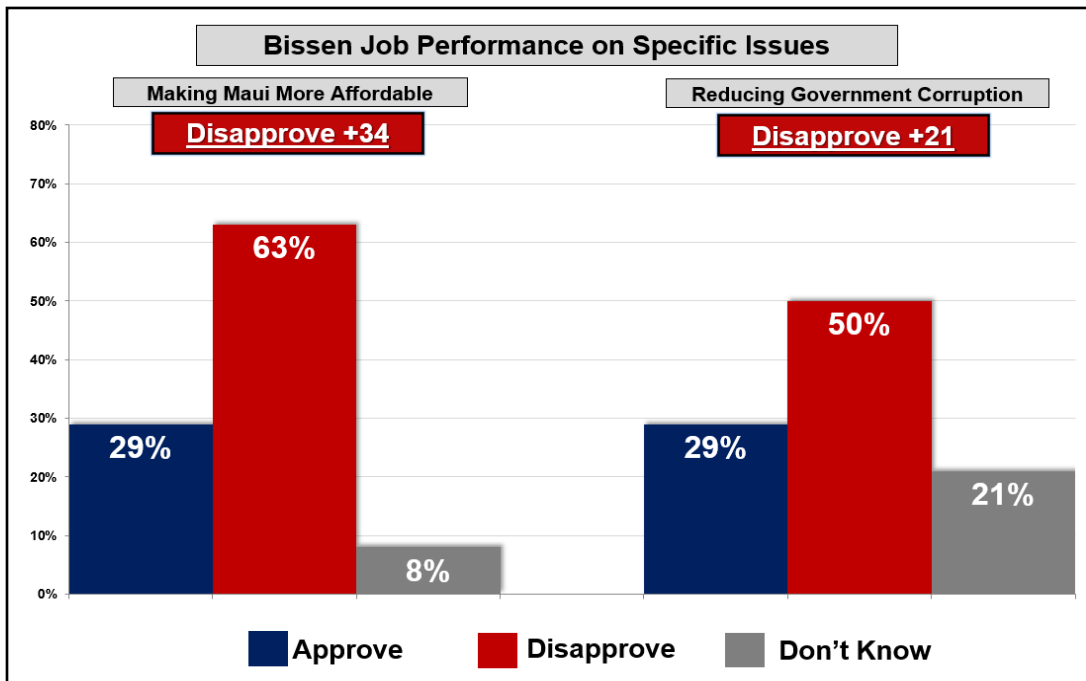
Sugimura Holds a Stronger Personal Profile Than Bissen

Underlying Sugimura’s growing advantage in the race is the fact that voters view her more positively than Mayor Bissen. Among voters familiar with her, Sugimura is viewed favorably by 41% of voters and unfavorably by 29%, giving her a positive net favorability rating of +11. By comparison, Bissen’s personal ratings are underwater by double digits, with the mayor viewed favorably by just 38% of voters, while a majority (52%) view him unfavorably, resulting in a negative net favorability rating of -14.



Bissen’s Weak Standing Is Driven by Concerns About Affordability, the Economy, and Government Accountability

Bissen’s weak personal standing with voters is driven largely by dissatisfaction on the issues voters care about most, particularly affordability, economic conditions, and confidence in county government. Bissen receives especially poor marks on “making Maui more affordable” (29% approve / 63% disapprove). He also remains underwater on “strengthening the economy and creating jobs” (35% approve / 54% disapprove), while half of voters (50%) disapprove of his performance on “reducing corruption in government,” reinforcing many of the same concerns that dominate the broader political environment in Maui County.



Sugimura’s Strongest Messages Align Closely with Voters’ Top Concerns

Not surprisingly, the messages that resonate most strongly for Sugimura closely reflect the same concerns driving dissatisfaction with the current direction of Maui County and Bissen’s standing as mayor. Messages focused on economic stewardship, supporting local businesses, government accountability, transparency, and lowering costs for local families all emerge among the strongest-performing arguments tested in the survey.

In particular, voters respond especially positively to messages highlighting Sugimura’s focus on strengthening the local economy and supporting Maui small businesses, her commitment to making government more accountable, transparent, and focused on delivering results, and her record of working to lower costs for local families. These findings suggest Sugimura’s strongest political attributes align closely with the issues voters are prioritizing most in the current political environment, particularly concerns around affordability, economic conditions, and confidence in county government.

Top Performing Thematic Messages for Yuki Lei Sugimura

Strong Local Economy

Yuki understands that a strong local economy starts with supporting the people who live and work here. As a small business owner, she knows the challenges of making payroll and navigating regulations and has worked to support community small businesses and create opportunities for local entrepreneurs. As Mayor, Yuki will create more local jobs by investing in industries beyond tourism, including agriculture, technology and trades, and helping local businesses grow and succeed.

Accountable & Transparent Government

Yuki believes government should be accountable to the people it serves and deliver results. She has pushed for transparency in how taxpayer dollars are spent, demanded clear answers from county departments, and worked to get things moving and make sure programs actually work. She will make government more efficient and focused on results, while ensuring decisions are open, honest, and transparent.

A More Affordable Maui

Yuki knows the cost of living is pushing too many Maui families to the brink. She led the effort to lower property taxes, stopped a proposal that would have raised water costs, and helped expand tax relief to bring down childcare costs. Yuki will work to lower the cost of living as Mayor and help families keep more of their hard-earned money so they can get ahead and build a secure future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the poll finds Maui County voters increasingly frustrated with both the rising cost of living and the direction of county government, creating a difficult political environment for incumbent Mayor Richard Bissen. Against this backdrop, Yuki Lei Sugimura has opened a clear lead in the race for Maui Mayor, driven not only by a stronger personal profile, but also by a campaign and message that closely align with the issues voters care about most. Taken together, the findings suggest an electorate looking for new leadership focused on affordability, economic stewardship, government accountability, and delivering more effective results for local families.

###

Survey Methodology:

The findings in this memo are based on a survey of 400 likely Maui County primary voters, conducted May 11–17, 2026. 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. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 4.9 percentage points.

The sample was drawn to reflect the likely Maui County primary electorate, and results were weighted to match expected turnout by key demographic characteristics, including age, gender, geography, and ethnicity.



Tulchin Research Memo – Maui Countywide Poll of Likely Primary Voters

5

About Tulchin Research:

Tulchin Research is a leading national polling and strategic consulting firm with over four decades of experience conducting accurate and impactful public opinion research, including conducting more public opinion research in Hawaii since 2010 than any other pollster.

Recently named Pollster of the Year® by the American Association of Political Consultants, our firm specializes in helping state and local governments and advocacy coalitions drive meaningful change for their communities through telephone surveys, online surveys, both in-person and online focus groups, on-line ad testing, modelling and other forms of public opinion research.

Whether it is providing messaging guidance to help bring a once unknown federal candidate like U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders to the brink of the Presidential nomination, or helping to make change in local policy that increases opportunities for local working families, Tulchin Research has been there time and again to help our clients turn complex issues and data insights into actionable strategy that delivers results.