

To: Interested Parties

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

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Poll Shows Tight Kauai Mayor's Race, with Carvalho's Runoff Position Under Threat

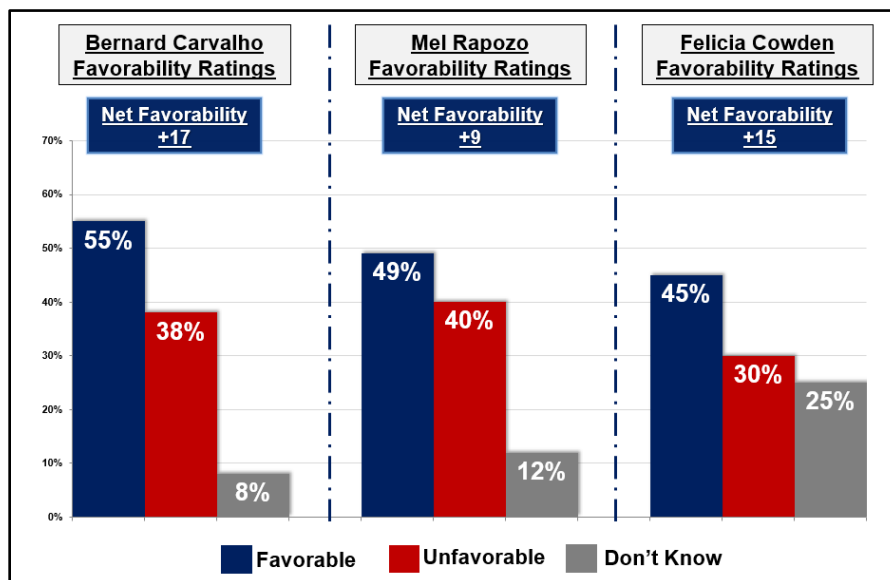
A new survey of likely Kauai primary voters finds a highly competitive race for Kauai Mayor. Former Mayor Bernard Carvalho is well positioned to compete with Council Chair Mel Rapozo in a head-to-head matchup for the general election, but he will need to make the run-off first in a competitive six-way primary race that is still very much up for grabs. Councilmember Felicia Cowden begins the race just two points behind Carvalho in the primary ballot, indicating Carvalho and his allies will need to wage a well-funded primary campaign to ensure he qualifies for the general election to face Rapozo in what this poll indicates is currently a toss-up.

The findings point to a clear strategic dynamic: Carvalho can win the argument against Rapozo, but only if he makes the runoff as Cowden is within striking distance.

Carvalho Has a Positive Personal Profile, but Cowden Has Room to Grow

Carvalho enters the race with a positive and well-established personal profile among Kauai voters. A majority of likely primary voters view him favorably (55%), while 38% view him unfavorably, giving him a net favorability rating of +17. He is also widely known across the electorate, with 92% of voters familiar enough with him to offer an opinion.

Rapozo is also well known, though voters are more divided in their views of him. He is identified by 88% of the electorate, with nearly a majority (49%) viewing him favorably compared to 40% who have unfavorable sentiments toward him, reflecting a +9 net favorability rating. Cowden is less defined (75% name ID), but her image is net positive (45% favorable to 30% unfavorable), resulting in a +15 net favorability rating



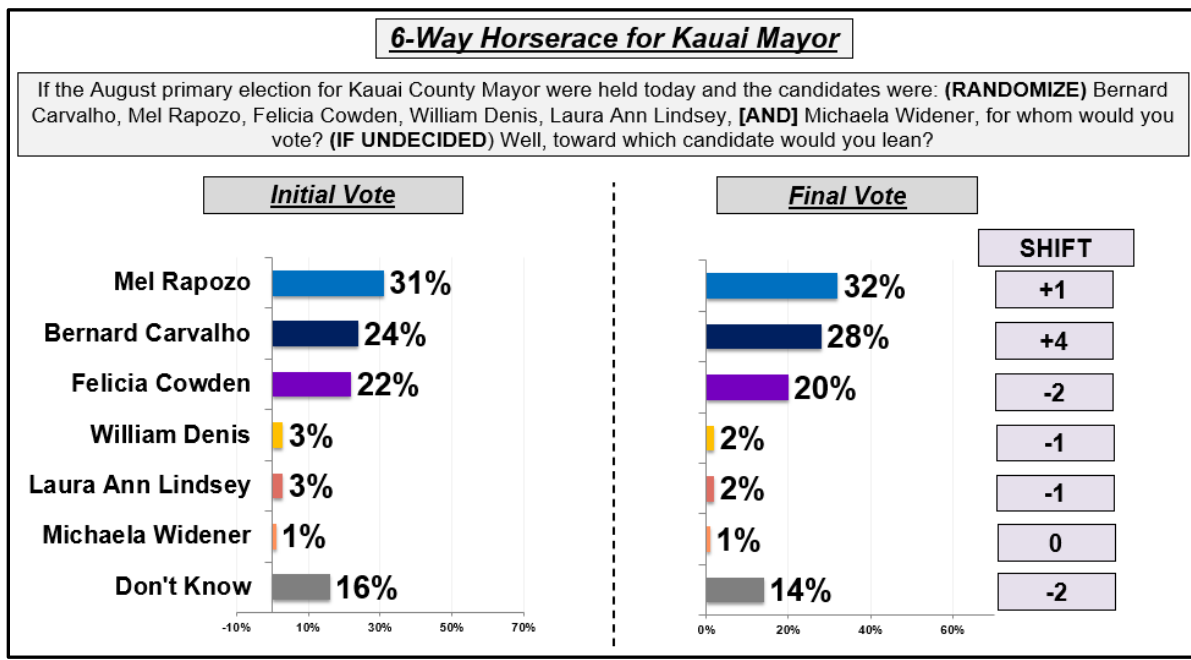
These findings underscore the competitive nature of the race heading into the mayoral ballot. Carvalho currently has the strongest combination of familiarity and favorability among the three leading candidates, while Rapozo is well known but more polarizing. However, Cowden has more room for growth as voters become more engaged, making it important for Carvalho to consolidate support early.

Rapozo Leads the Primary, Cowden Threatens Carvalho’s Runoff Position

In the initial six-way ballot for Kauai Mayor, Rapozo leads the field (31%), followed by Carvalho (24%) and Cowden (22%). The rest of the field remains far behind in low single digit support while 16% of likely voters are undecided.

These results show a competitive 3-way battle for the top two spots in this multi-candidate race. Carvalho’s margin over Cowden is only two points, reflecting a statistical tie given the survey’s margin of error, placing her clearly within striking distance. If the race remains fragmented or Carvalho fails to expand his support, Cowden has a credible opportunity to increase her standing and overtake him to claim the second runoff position.

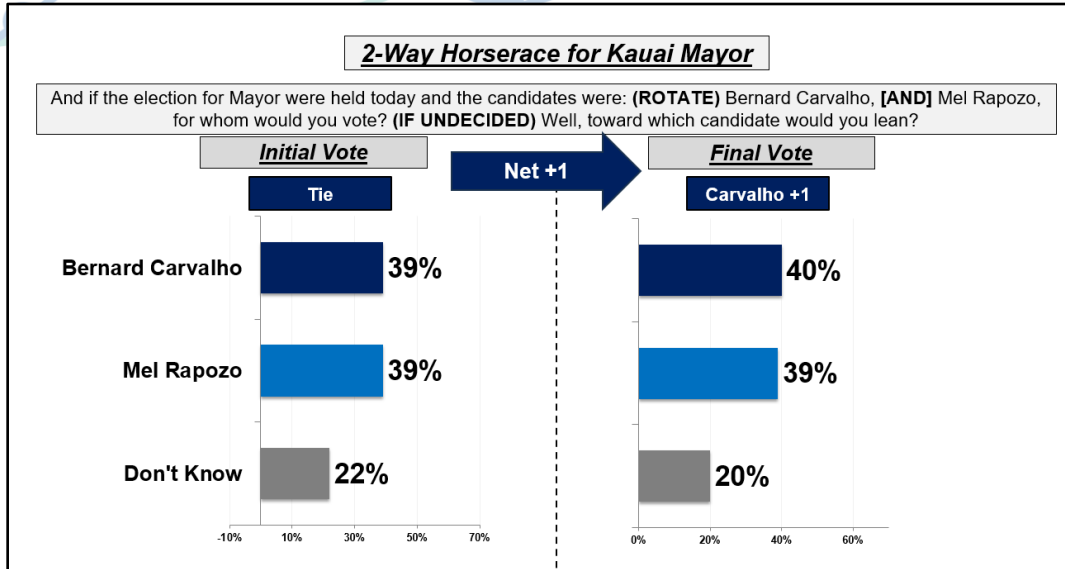
That said, Carvalho also sees the largest gain in support after voters hear biographical information about the candidates. Carvalho improves his standing by 4 points, rising from 24% to 28% while Rapozo sees a mild increase from 31% to 32% and Cowden declines slightly from 22% to 20%. Biographical information helps Carvalho create more separation from Cowden, but it does not resolve the central challenge. Carvalho must still consolidate enough support in the six-way field to ensure he advances to a direct contest against Rapozo.



Carvalho and Rapozo Are Tied in Head-to-Head General Election Matchup

The head-to-head results underscore the stakes of Carvalho securing a place in the final matchup. In a direct contest against Rapozo, the race is tied, with Carvalho and Rapozo each receiving 39% support and 22% undecided. After voters hear biographical information about both candidates, Carvalho moves into a narrow one-point advantage over Rapozo, 40% to 39%, with 20% undecided.

These findings suggest that if Carvalho advances, the race against Rapozo begins as a true toss-up rather than a Rapozo advantage given incumbency. Carvalho’s positive personal profile, broad name identification, and modest movement after voters hear more about his record all point to a competitive path forward. However, as noted above, Carvalho must first hold his position in the six-way field before focusing on a two-way race that is effectively tied with a path to win.



Conclusion

The poll shows real opportunity for Carvalho but also reveals a very competitive race in both the primary and general election. He has a widely known and positive personal profile, gains ground after voters hear more about his record, and runs even with Rapozo in a head-to-head matchup. But he is not yet secure in the six-way primary as Felicia Cowden begins just two points behind him and has a positive image with potential to grow, indicating Carvalho and his allies need to wage a serious primary campaign to ensure he qualifies for the general election.

Carvalho’s campaign must move quickly to make the stakes clear, grow his support, and secure his place to move on to the general election. If Carvalho advances to a head-to-head contest with Rapozo, the race is a virtual tie. But if he fails to consolidate support in the primary, Cowden has a credible chance to overtake him.

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Survey Methodology:

The findings in this memo are based on a survey of 200 likely Kauai County primary voters, conducted June 13–16, 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 ±6.9 percentage points.

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

Tulchin Research Memo – Kauai Countywide Poll

4

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.