

## Summary of Findings on National Issues, Spring 2005

**Bush can keep us safe and wealthy, but not united and healthy, Tennesseans say.**

President George W. Bush will be able to improve military security for the country during his second term as well as keep the country prosperous and improve education, most Tennesseans believe. But most doubt he'll be able to heal the country's political divisions, cut taxes, or improve Medicare, Social Security, the environment, or health care. *Contact: Ken Blake.*

**Under-50s more likely to participate in Social Security changes.** Tennesseans are closely divided about opting in to President Bush's proposed Social Security plan to allow those born after 1949 to invest part of their withholding in the stock market. Fully 63% of those under 50 were willing to join Bush's plan, compared to 31% of older citizens. *Contact: Robert Wyatt.*

**Most say Iraqi war going well, opinion closer on whether it was a mistake.** A majority (52%) now say that the war in Iraq is going moderately well (44%) or very well (8%), a rise from last fall's poll. A bare majority (50%) say the war was not a mistake. *Contact: Robert Wyatt.*

**State divided on Saddam's 9/11 role, with Evangelicals opting yes.** A plurality (40%) see Saddam Hussein as uninvolved in the 9/11 attacks, although 38% - and 47% of Evangelicals - still think he was. There is no evidence linking Hussein to the attacks. *Contact: Robert Wyatt.*

**Evangelicals more optimistic about a religious than a political agenda.** Tennessee Evangelicals deem George W. Bush more able to improve morality, secure divine favor and increase belief in God than to press some of the religious right's key issues. *Contact: Ken Blake.*

**Opinion conservative on abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, 10 Commandments.** Tennesseans - especially Evangelicals - express conservative personal opinions on gay marriage, abortion, school prayer, and displaying the 10 Commandments. *Contact: Ken Blake.*

**Race, religion remain key factors in Tennesseans' support for Bush.** A solid majority (55%) of Tennesseans say they approve of how Bush is handling his job as president. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of whites approve, a figure that rises to 69% among white Evangelicals. *Contact: Ken Blake.*

**More tolerance for KKK than Al-Qaeda; Evangelicals less tolerant of both.** Tennesseans are more willing to allow a Ku Klux Klan supporter to make a public speech (58%) than an al-Qaeda supporter (47%) Fully 60% of Evangelicals would prohibit the al-Qaeda speech, compared to 37% of others. *Contact: Robert Wyatt.*

## Details of Findings on National Issues, Spring 2005

**Bush can keep us safe and wealthy, but not united and healthy, Tennesseans say.**

*Contact: Ken Blake*

President George W. Bush will be able to improve military security for the country during his second term as well as keep the country prosperous and improve education, most Tennesseans believe. But most doubt he'll be able to heal the country's political divisions, shore up the Medicare and Social Security systems, better the environment, improve health care, or cut their taxes (See Table 1).

**Table 1:  
Tennesseans' estimates of Bush's ability  
to accomplish selected goals**

<b>Question: Will Bush be able to ...</b>	<b>Will</b>	<b>Will not</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Refused</b>
<b>Improve military security for country</b>	69%	26%	5%	0%
<b>Keep America prosperous</b>	59	32	9	0
<b>Improve education</b>	56	38	5	1
<b>Increase respect for the presidency</b>	50	43	6	1
<b>Improve moral values in U.S.</b>	46	47	6	1
<b>Improve respect for the U.S. abroad</b>	45	48	6	1
<b>Cut your taxes</b>	40	52	8	0
<b>Improve quality of the environment</b>	38	52	9	1
<b>Ensure long-term strength of Medicare</b>	37	48	15	0
<b>Improve healthcare system</b>	37	52	10	1
<b>Ensure long-term strength of Social Security</b>	34	54	11	1
<b>Heal political divisions in country</b>	23	68	9	0

Across the board, Tennesseans who support Bush and the Republican Party are more optimistic than others that Bush will be able to accomplish these goals. Behind party loyalties, race and religiosity emerge as key factors, with whites and Evangelicals generally more optimistic than others.

In a typical pattern, 64% of whites say Bush will be able to keep America prosperous compared to just 32% of minorities. And among whites, 70% of Evangelicals think Bush will be able to keep the country prosperous compared to 53% of non-Evangelicals.

Exceptions to the pattern include estimates of Bush's ability to cut one's taxes, where younger, better-educated registered voters are the most optimistic. Another exception: When Tennesseans are asked about Bush's ability to ensure the long-term strength of Medicare, age is the main factor, with younger Tennesseans tending to express pessimism and older Tennesseans saying they don't know.

Out of all of the political expectations measured, those regarding military security and economic prosperity are the most strongly associated with voting choices in the last election. Of Tennesseans who think Bush will be able to keep America prosperous, 69% voted for Bush. And among these individuals, 76% of those who think Bush can improve the nation's military security voted for him. By contrast, only 11% of those who say Bush won't be able to keep the country prosperous voted for him in 2004.

Tennesseans generally mirror national-level opinions on these questions, a comparison with findings from a nationwide Gallup poll conducted last month and at the start of Bush's first term shows (See Table 2). And both Tennesseans and Americans in general are less optimistic about Bush's ability to do these things than Gallup found Americans were in January 2001, when Bush began his first term.

Tennesseans are most notably less optimistic than the rest of the nation about Bush's ability to improve healthcare, improve the nation's morals, and shore up the Social Security system. But they are most notably more optimistic than the rest of the nation about Bush's ability to heal the country's political divisions.

**Table 2:  
Estimates of Bush's ability to accomplish selected goals  
U.S. v. Tennessee, 2001 - 2005**

Question: Will Bush be able to ...	Pct. "Yes"		
	U.S. Jan. 2001	U.S. Jan. 2005	Tennessee Feb. 2005
Improve military security for country	81%	73%	69%
Keep America prosperous	63	62	59
Improve education	66	58	56
Increase respect for the presidency	61	54	50
Improve moral values in U.S.	55	57	46
Improve respect for the U.S. abroad	58	50	45
Heal political divisions in country	41	33	42
Cut your taxes	49	---	40
Improve quality of the environment	42	39	38
Ensure long-term strength of Medicare	49	42	37
Improve healthcare system	46	44	37
Ensure long-term strength of Social Security	50	40	34

**Under-50s more likely to participate in Bush Social Security proposal**

*Contact: Robert Wyatt or Ken Blake*

Tennesseans are closely divided about opting in to President Bush's Social Security plan allowing those born after 1949 to invest part of their withholding in the stock market.

A majority (54%) who say they are eligible report that they would choose the new plan, but another 46% say they would stay with the current guaranteed-benefits system. Here, age is the determining factor: 63% of those under 50 were willing to join Bush's plan, while 37% were not. Among those 50 and over, fewer than one-third (31%) would choose the stock-market option, while 69% would not. Among the group under 50, political affiliation was also an important factor in determining participation: A majority of under-50 Democrats and independents (51%) said they would not take part, while, among Republicans and others nearly four-fifths (79%) said they would sign up.

Of the total group surveyed, more than one-fourth (28%) reported that they are unable to take part in the plan for a variety of reasons. Interestingly, nearly one-fourth (23%) of those over 65 reported that they would not participate, even though they would clearly be ineligible anyway.

**Majority say Iraqi war going well, opinion closer on whether it was a mistake**

*Contact: Robert Wyatt*

A majority (52%) of Tennesseans now say that the war in Iraq is going moderately well (44%) or very well (8%). This represents a jump from a total of 45% in last fall's poll, a jump which follows President Bush's re-election and an Iraqi election that saw high participation. Still, 45% said the war is going either moderately badly (26%) or very badly (18%).

Perceptions of the war today are strongly tied to how Tennesseans voted last fall, with 82% of reported Bush voters saying the war is going well and 81% of Kerry voters saying the war is going badly.

Those who did not report voting or who voted for someone else fall between the partisans. Among them, half (50%) chose one of the "going badly" options, and 43% chose one of the "going well" responses. Others said they didn't know or refused to answer.

Half (50%) of the sample reported voting for Bush, about one-third (30%) reported a Kerry vote, and nearly one-fourth (23%) reported not voting or some other option.

Tennesseans are more evenly divided about whether going to war in the first place was a mistake. Here, a bare majority (50%) say it was not a mistake, while 45% say it was. Again, partisanship is important, with three quarters (75%) of reported Bush voters saying it was not a mistake, as opposed to the 79% of reported Kerry or other voters who say it was a mistake.

**State divided on Saddam's 9/11 role, with Evangelicals opting for yes**

*Contact: Robert Wyatt*

By now, a plurality (40%) of Tennesseans believe that Saddam Hussein did nothing to plan or support the 9/11 attacks, although 38% still think he did. More than one-fifth (22%) still say they do not know.

Here, respondents' assessment of the nature of the Bible – one measure of Evangelicalism – has the greatest impact on their assessment of Hussein's involvement. Nearly a majority (47%) of those who say that the Bible is the literal word of God think Hussein was involved, compared to fewer than one-third (31%) who consider the Bible inspired but not literal, and only 18% of those who say the Bible is a collection of fables, legends, and history.

Nearly half (46%) of our sample are biblical literalists, while 41% opt for biblical inspiration, and only 9% choose the fable-legend-history option.

For the record, the U.S. has uncovered no major evidence that Hussein had any significant involvement in the attacks.

**Evangelicals more optimistic about a religious than a political agenda**

*Contact: Ken Blake*

Evangelicals in Tennessee seem more optimistic about George W. Bush's ability to improve Americans' morality, secure divine favor and increase belief in God than about Bush's ability to press some of the religious right's key political issues.

As Table 3 shows, about half of Tennessee's Evangelicals think George W. Bush will be able to "improve moral values in the United States," "secure God's blessing on the United States," and "increase belief in God" during the next four years. Half also think Bush will be able to ban gay marriage. But substantially fewer think Bush will be able to end restrictions on displaying the 10 Commandments in public buildings, end restrictions on school prayer, and outlaw abortion.

The data cannot speak to the reasons behind Evangelicals' relative skepticism of Bush's ability to effect change on these issues. Evangelicals may perceive Bush as uninterested in these goals, or they may perceive Bush as willing to pursue these goals but likely to be frustrated by opponents, or they may have other reasons for expressing these opinions.

Other findings, though, suggest that many Evangelicals voted for Bush in the last election at least partly because they believed his presence in the White House would reflect positively on public perceptions of their faith. Most (53%) Evangelicals said they thought Bush's presence in the White House would cause other people to take religious faith more seriously. And of the Evangelicals who held that opinion, nearly three-fourths (72%) voted for Bush. Although not definitively causal, the relationship survived statistical controls for all of the poll's demographic variables. The finding may be evidence of what mass communication scholars call a "third-person effect," or people's tendency to both perceive mass media messages and images as highly influential on others and to behave in ways consistent with that perception.

**Table 3:  
Estimates of Bush's ability to accomplish selected goals  
Evangelicals, non-Evangelicals, and all Tennesseans  
Pct. "Yes"**

<b>Question: Will Bush be able to ...</b>	<b>Evangelicals</b>	<b>Non- Evangelicals</b>	<b>All Tennesseans</b>
<b>Improve moral values in the United States</b>	54%	35%	46%
<b>Secure God's blessing on the United States</b>	52	25	42
<b>Increase belief in God</b>	51	27	42
<b>Amend Constitution to ban gay marriage</b>	50	30	42
<b>End limits on displaying 10 Commandments</b>	41	22	35
<b>End limits on school prayer</b>	35	26	31
<b>Outlaw abortion</b>	34	15	26

**Opinion conservative on abortion, gay marriage school prayer, 10 Commandments**

*Contact: Ken Blake*

Tennesseans – especially Evangelical Tennesseans - do not hesitate, however, to express strong personal opposition to gay marriage, abortion, and restrictions on school prayer and displays of the 10 Commandments. Nearly three-fourths of state residents (70%) say gay marriages should not be recognized by the law. Under a quarter (23%) say it should, and the

rest aren't sure. Sixty-one percent say abortion should be legal only under "certain circumstances," and 20% say it should be illegal in all circumstances. Only 17% say abortion should be legal in all circumstances, and the rest aren't sure. Eighty percent favor allowing daily prayer to be spoken in public school classrooms, and just as many (80%) would approve of displaying a monument to the 10 Commandments in a public school or governmental building. In both instances, only about 16 percent express opposition, and the rest aren't sure.

These attitudes are especially pronounced among the state's Evangelicals, 87% of whom oppose gay marriage, 30% of whom would make abortion illegal in all circumstances, 91% of whom favor prayer in public schools, and 93% of whom would support displaying a monument to the 10 Commandments in a public school or government building. Although they may doubt the viability of these positions in the political arena (see above), Evangelicals clearly hold intense personal views on these matters.

**Race, religion remain key factors in Tennesseans' support for Bush**

*Contact: Ken Blake*

Overall, a majority (55%) of Tennesseans say they approve of how George W. Bush is handling his job as president. In concurrent national polling by Gallup, Bush's approval rating stood at 49%, down from the 57% approval seen in early February just after Bush's State of the Union address. In Tennessee last spring, Bush's approval rating in Tennessee was 53%.

As in previous MTSU Polls, race and religion define the shape of Bush's support in the state. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of whites approve of Bush compared to less than a quarter (22%) of minorities. And among whites, 69% of Evangelicals approve of Bush compared to 39% of non-Evangelicals. Among Evangelicals who attend church at least "almost every week," over three-fourths (76%) approve of Bush

**Citizens more tolerant of KKK than Al-Qaeda; Evangelicals less tolerant of both**

*Contact: Robert Wyatt*

Tennesseans generally show more tolerance for expression of pro-Ku Klux Klan views than for expression of pro-Al-Qaeda views.

To measure tolerance, the poll included a standard battery of questions describing an individual and then asking respondents whether they would allow that individual to make a public speech, teach in a college or university, and circulate a book through the library. The questions were asked about two different individuals: someone who "speaks out in support of the Ku Klux Klan," and someone who "speaks out in support of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organization."

Tennesseans are more willing to allow a Ku Klux Klan supporter to make a public speech than an al-Qaeda supporter. While a majority (58%) favored tolerance for the the KKK speaker, opinion was evenly divided about the al-Qaeda speaker (47% both pro and con).

Evangelicals were more willing than others to censor the al-Qaeda speaker. Fully 60% who consider the Bible the literal word of God opted to prohibit the al-Qaeda speech, compared to 37% of those who consider the Bible inspired but not literal or who selected other options.

Evangelicals were also more willing than others to censor the KKK speaker. Those who identified themselves as born-again Christians were also more likely to nix the KKK speech (43%) than those who did not identify as reborn (26%).

When considering whether supporters of each group should be allowed to teach in college, just 28% opted for the al-Qaeda-aligned teacher, but a heavy majority (58%) opted for the KKK-aligned teacher.

Political orientation best predicted opposition to the al-Qaeda supporter as teacher. Fully 80% of conservatives said no, compared to 43% of liberals and those on the far left and 60% of middle-of-the-roads.

Tennesseans are more tolerant of library books than teachers or speakers. Regarding removing al-Qaeda and KKK supporters' books from a public library, just 43% would ban the al-Qaeda book and only 40% would censor the KKK book.

### **Appendix A: Measuring attitudes in polls**

Attitudes toward many issues – such as taxes, military actions, or immigrants – are complex. The same person may hold several contradictory notions and balance them off against each other to determine an overall attitude.

For example, in forming an attitude toward abortion, the same person may believe that abortion should not be used as a method of birth control. When asked bluntly whether he or she is in favor of abortion, that person might reply either “No” or “Yes.” This is because the same person could also believe that abortion is acceptable in cases of incest, rape, or serious defects in the fetus. To learn the person's attitude, a survey researcher must therefore ask more than one question, then report the results in all their complexity.

### **Appendix B: Evangelicalism in Tennessee**

The label “Evangelical” is claimed by subgroups within a wide array of Christian types including Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics, Lutherans, and more. To complicate matters, many self-described Evangelicals attend non-denominational churches, and still others hold Evangelical beliefs and exhibit Evangelical behaviors without identifying with or even recognizing the term “Evangelical.” In short, Evangelicalism is an abstraction, and there is no perfect way to measure it. But whatever it is, Evangelicalism is a strong force in Tennessee politics, and an interpretation of Tennessee attitudes would be incomplete without some attempt to account for it.

The MTSU Poll assesses Evangelicalism by asking individuals whether they consider themselves an “Evangelical or born-again” Christian and also by measuring three themes often found in Evangelical belief and practice: Belief that the Bible is the “actual word of God” and should be “taken literally, word for word,” belief that “Jesus will return to earth and take all true Christians to heaven, leaving non-Christians here to face tribulation and the Antichrist,” and a personal history of having “tried to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ or to accept Jesus Christ as his or her savior.” In Tennessee, all three measures correlate positively and strongly – although not perfectly – with self-identification as an Evangelical, and when one or more of these measures emerges as a significant predictor, the predictor is assumed to accurately characterize the attitudes of Evangelicals.

**Appendix C: Sample and method**

The poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 3 through Feb. 11, 2005, by students in the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. Students interviewed 565 people age 18 or older chosen at random from the state population. The poll has an estimated error margin of  $\pm 4$  percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. Theoretically, this means that a sample of this size should produce a statistical portrait of the population within 4 percentage points 95 out of 100 times. Other factors, such as question wording, also affect the outcome of a survey. Error margins are greater for sample subgroups.

The sample varied somewhat from the U.S. Census Bureau's latest available projections for age, race and gender proportions within the state. Such variation commonly occurs because certain demographic groups are more difficult to contact. The data were thus weighted to more closely match Census projections for these demographics. Here are the Census data, the sample data, and the weights:

	Census	Sample	Weight	Result
<b>Age:</b>				
18-34	29.6%	24.0%	1.23	30.9%
35-49	30.2%	27.4%	1.10	31.1%
50-64	23.6%	26.3%	0.90	22.2%
65+	16.6%	22.3%	0.74	15.8%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
<b>Race:</b>				
White	83.7%	87.4%	0.96	82.5%
Black	15.0%	7.5%	2.00	16.3%
Other	1.3%	4.5%	0.28	1.2%
	100.0%	99.4%		100.0%
<b>Gender:</b>				
Male	47.5%	42.7%	1.11	48.9%
Female	52.5%	57.3%	0.92	51.1%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%

Small variations in reported percentages (1% or less) sometimes result for rounding variations in different statistical procedures or the way different programs handle population weights.