

The Middle Tennessee Poll **MTPoll-Statewide**

MTSU Office of Communication Research

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Summary of Major Statewide Findings, Fall 2001

Terrorism and the Sept. 11 attacks:

Almost all approve of Afghanistan military action. Over 93% say they approve of the military action, even though two thirds believe the campaign will last at least a year and a third believe that it will last more than two years.

“Turn other cheek” not applicable to terrorism; Muslims may worship different God.

When self-described Christians are reminded that Jesus tells followers to turn the other cheek, only about one fourth (28%) say it means that the U.S. should not retaliate against terrorists. Just over half (55%) believe that Christians and Muslims pray to the same God.

Heavy majority would sacrifice civil, media rights to fight terrorism. Nearly two thirds of Tennesseans (61%) are willing to give up some of their own civil liberties to fight terrorism. More than three quarters (78%) feel that the news media should give up their liberties.

Most see low risk of personal exposure to anthrax. Most Tennesseans say they are either “Not too” (40%) or “Not at all” (23%) worried about becoming a victim of anthrax or some other biological weapon.

Other terrorism topics: Confidence in military high during crisis, presidency somewhat lower • General confidence in media slips, but attack coverage still rated high • America not God’s chosen nation, but deity backs U.S. terrorism campaign • Word of attack spread quickly; half watched live as second jet hit World Trade Center • State split on whether attack planners should meet fate in court or on the battlefield.

Slavery reparations, taxes, and the economy:

Most oppose U.S. slavery reparations but favor American Indian reparations. A solid majority of Tennesseans (58%) opposes U.S. government reparations for African Americans who are descendants of U.S. slaves. But a solid majority supports the U.S. government’s decision to provide reparations for American Indians whose treaties were violated (68%).

Rich, bright, white, and right less supportive of slavery reparations. Attitudes toward slavery reparations fracture along many demographic lines.

State financial crisis real, but most oppose income tax. A majority of Tennesseans now believe that the state faces a financial crisis, but most still oppose a state income tax.

Tennesseans sweating national economy, but not personal finances. Most state residents (59%) see a worsening national economy. But about as many (60%) think their personal fortunes will improve in the year to come.

Details of findings

Terrorism and the Sept. 11 attacks:

Almost all approve of Afghanistan military action, most undeterred by civilian casualties

Tennesseans are overwhelmingly committed to the military campaign in Afghanistan. Over 93% say they approve of the military action, even though two thirds believe the campaign will last at least a year and 33% believe it will last more than two years. Seventy percent say they would support a ground invasion of Afghanistan, and 53% are not deterred by the possibility of casualties among Afghani civilians.

Comparing the results of our Tennessee poll to national opinion polls is tricky because opinion about these issues is quickly changing. However, a CNN/Gallup poll of Americans found that levels of support for military action were comparable to those we found: about 90% of Americans favored military action against Afghanistan. That poll, taken October 5th and 6th, showed that 48% of Americans expected the war to last for a year or more. Tennesseans, polled somewhat later in the month, were more pessimistic about the war's duration: 67% expected the war to last a year or more.

The national poll showed 77% support for an invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. ground troops. Further, 65% continued to favor invasion even if civilians were killed. Tennesseans, after watching the conflict for an additional two to four weeks, remained committed to invasion as an option, with 70% voicing support for this possibility. However, they were more troubled about the possibility of civilian casualties. Fifty-three percent support the invasion option even if it means civilian casualties. While this is still a majority, it is significantly lower than the levels of support the national poll recorded in early October.

“Turn other cheek” not applicable to terrorism; Muslims may worship different God

When those who identified themselves as Christians are reminded that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, tells followers not to resist evildoers but turn the other cheek, just over one fourth (28%) say Jesus' words mean that the U.S. should not retaliate against terrorists. But fully 85% believe that Christians should pray for their enemies, again following the Sermon on the Mount.

Religious practice, affiliation, and attendance, however, did not emerge as major predictors of other issues in the campaign against terrorism, including approval of the current policy or support for a military invasion of Afghanistan that might kill innocent citizens. These findings indicate that religious convictions are seen as private values that do not extend to military, criminal, and perhaps other political matters.

A full 85% of our respondents believe that Jews and Christians pray to the same God, a conviction that stretches across all Christian subgroups. However, just over half (55%) believe that Christians and Muslims pray to the same God. And a similar majority (56%) believe that Jews and Muslims pray to the same God.

Less than a majority of Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and evangelicals (43%), however, believe that the Christian and Muslim deities are the same, compared with nearly two thirds

(71%) of mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and others. Once again, religious convictions appear polarized by theology and ideology.

Heavy majority would sacrifice civil, media rights to fight terrorism

Nearly two thirds of Tennesseans (61%) are willing to give up some of their own civil liberties to fight terrorism. And more than three quarters (78%) believe that the news media should give up some protections, too. Just half (49%), however, believe that the right of individuals to criticize the president should be protected unconditionally by the law. Just over one fourth (28%) would grant unconditional protection to journalists who report on national security issues without government approval.

Times of national crisis actually seem to increase support for many democratic values, including free expression, except where national security is concerned. Thus, more than four in 10 (43%) Tennesseans agree that a journalist's right to criticize politicians should be protected unconditionally.

Today, less than four in 10 Tennesseans (39%) give unconditional support to journalists who criticize the military. And only 30% would support that journalistic right to side with foreign governments against the U.S. position. Generally, the younger and better educated are more supportive of journalistic rights affecting national security.

Most see low risk of personal exposure to anthrax

Most Tennesseans say they are either "Not too" (40%) or "Not at all" (23%) worried about becoming a victim of anthrax or some other biological weapon. Twenty-three percent describe themselves as "somewhat worried," and only 12% say they are "very worried." Concern is greatest among Tennesseans with incomes of \$50,000 a year or less, 27% of whom are "somewhat" worried and 15% of whom are "very" worried. Among those earning more than \$50,000 a year, by contrast, 14% are "somewhat" worried, and 5% are "very worried."

Tennesseans consider their state to be less at risk for terrorism than the nation as a whole, but their worries about the threat of terrorism are significant. Half of all Tennesseans say they are very worried or somewhat worried that events like the Sept. 11 attacks could happen here in Tennessee. Almost two thirds of Tennesseans say they are very worried or somewhat worried about future acts of terrorism in the United States as a whole.

Despite their general concerns, few Tennesseans say they are personally concerned about becoming a victim of terrorism. Less than one quarter of Tennesseans say they worry about terrorism when they are in public places, although 76% of those who have this concern say it was a result of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Confidence in military high during crisis; presidency, FBI, CIA lower

The U.S. military, not surprisingly, has climbed dramatically in public confidence in the last two years – likely the result of the current campaign against terrorism abroad. A similar phenomenon occurred during the Gulf War, though ratings later declined nationally.

Today, nearly three fourths of Tennesseans (71%) express a great deal of confidence in the military, compared with less than one half (46%) in our fall 1999 survey.

Though the U.S. Supreme Court, medicine, and science retain their traditionally high ratings, other institutions do not fare so well.

The terrorism campaign and a switch in administrations both seem to have been kind to the presidency. The executive branch of the U.S. government showed a significant increase in confidence over fall 1999, with more than four in 10 Tennesseans (41%) expressing a great deal of confidence, compared to only 14% two years ago. But there are large partisan differences here, with 54% of Republicans expressing high confidence but only 26% of Democrats. Among independents and those with no affiliation, 44% indicate high confidence.

A similar proportion of Tennesseans (41%) have high confidence both in the FBI and the CIA. But less than one fifth (18%) have high confidence in airport security. Still, more than one third (36%) have high confidence that authorities can prevent future attacks. Congress seems to have benefited only marginally from the current situation. Nearly one fourth of Tennesseans (23%) report high confidence here, compared to about 20% in 1999.

General confidence in media slips, but attack coverage still rated high

Recent events, however, seem to have been hard on confidence in the media, whose confidence ratings have been dropping steadily in national data during the last 25 years.

In Tennessee over the last two years, confidence in the press has polarized. While 14% showed great confidence (up from 9% in 1999), nearly four in 10 (39%) reported hardly any confidence at all in the press (compared with 27% in 1999). Confidence in television showed similar movement, with 16% showing high confidence (compared with 12%) but 42% showing hardly any (compared with 28%).

Confidence in organized religion remains high, with 40% reporting a great deal of confidence. This is, however, not significantly different from 1999 ratings despite the public character of religion surrounding the terrorism crisis.

Despite their low confidence in media compared to other institutions, Tennesseans rate national television network news coverage of the Sept. 11 attack exceptionally credible and public minded compared both to network news' general performance and to network news' coverage of the vote count in Florida during the 2000 presidential election.

The networks' attack coverage scored a 75% on a credibility index measuring fairness, neutrality, thoroughness, accuracy, and trustworthiness. On the same index, the networks earned a 53% for their performance in general and a 46% for their coverage of the vote count in Florida during the 2000 presidential election.

Similarly, attack coverage by the networks earned an 80% on a public-mindedness index tapping concern for the nation's well being, stewardship of the public interest, attention to viewers' personal interests, and patriotism. The networks earned a 61% on the index for their performance in general and a 48% for their coverage of the Florida vote count.

More than half of Tennesseans polled (53%) felt the level of media coverage following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was "about right," though a full 40% felt there was too much media coverage. Almost 53% of Tennesseans watched media

coverage surrounding the terrorist attacks “off and on” during the first 24 hours; however, more than 25% watched during “all their waking hours.”

America not God’s chosen nation, but God backs U.S. terrorism campaign

Despite Tennessee’s Bible Belt reputation, more than three fourths (76%) do not believe that God regards the United States as a special nation chosen above others. However, nearly one third (31%) of those who identify themselves as Pentecostals, fundamentalists, or evangelicals do support the “chosen nation” theory, as opposed to only 10% of mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and others.

Still, a majority (55%) say God will support the U.S. in its current campaign against terrorism. This figure rises to more than two thirds (69%) among those who attend religious ceremonies every week, compared with 45% of those who attend less frequently or never.

Only about 11% regard the Sept. 11 attack as divine punishment for the sins of the United States, following the lead of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, who later recanted the assertion. But nearly one in five (19%) who attend services every week see the event as punishment, compared with only 5% of those who attend less often. Among those who endorse the punishment theory, America’s tolerance of abortion (72%) and homosexuality (70%) were leading reasons for God’s wrath, followed at a distance by failure to feed America’s poor (48%) and tolerance of feminism (41%).

Word of Sept. 11 attack spread quickly; half watched second Trade Center crash “live”

Word of the Sept. 11 attack spread rapidly among Tennesseans. Seventeen percent said they knew of the attack around 7:45 a.m. Central time when the first jet crashed into the World Trade Center. By the time the second jet struck the center around 8 a.m., about a third (33%) were aware. About half (49%) knew by 8:30 a.m. – just before networks began showing footage of the Pentagon on fire.

Nearly three fourths (72%) knew by the time the World Trade Center’s south tower collapsed just before 9 a.m., and 85% had heard by the time the north tower fell at 9:30 a.m. No one reported learning later than 1 p.m. On average, men learned within 75 minutes, and women learned within 90 minutes. By another measure, news of the attack spread even faster: Fully half of the state’s residents said they were watching coverage at the instant the second jet crashed into the World Trade Center and exploded. Interestingly, news of the attack spread no more quickly – and perhaps even a bit more slowly – than news of John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963.

Forty-four percent learned the terrorist attack news while at home, and 33% heard while at work. Another 14% learned while they were “out somewhere,” and the rest were either out of town or somewhere else. More of the poorest Tennesseans – those earning \$15,000 or less – heard while at home (59%) than wealthier Tennesseans (34%). Most state residents learned from a news report on television (35%).

About a third (32%) stopped their usual activities for the rest of the day. Another third (30%) stopped, then resumed, their usual activities, and a final third (37%) carried on as usual. More

women (38%) than men (23%) stopped for the rest of the day. Men were more likely than women to either stop, then resume (33%) or carry on as usual (44%).

Over a third (34%) chose a friend as the first person to open a conversation with about the attack. Another quarter (27%) chose their spouse, and a fifth (20%) selected some other relative. Twelve percent turned to a co-worker. Only 4% first discussed the attack with a stranger.

State split on whether 9/11 attack's planners should meet fate in court or in battle

Tennesseans are evenly divided over whether they would like to see those responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks captured and tried or killed in a military action. About 45% say they would prefer to see the perpetrators killed in a military action, while 47% say they would prefer a trial.

The U.S. justice system has previously tried terrorists like Timothy McVeigh for murder because of the deaths they have caused, and other terrorists have been tried in international courts. Given the option of a U.N. trial, a majority of Tennesseans (51%) would prefer to see those responsible for the terrorist attacks tried in the United States for murder. However, a sizeable minority (40%) would like to see those responsible tried by the U.N. for crimes against humanity.

Tennesseans' opinions about what they would like to see happen to the terrorists affect their level of support for military action. Nearly two thirds of those who would prefer to see the terrorists killed in action strongly favor the U.S. military campaign, while only 41% of those who would prefer to see the terrorists tried in court strongly favor the campaign.

Over 70% believe the United States should be involved in world affairs. This level of support is comparable to that found in national samples in the middle 1990s, suggesting that the events of Sept. 11 have not lessened Tennesseans' approval of world involvement. In spite of their support for America's role in world affairs, 41% of our respondents believe that American foreign policy contributed to the terrorist attacks.

Slavery reparations, taxes, and the economy:

Most oppose U.S. slavery reparations but favor American Indian reparations

A solid majority of Tennesseans (58%) opposes U.S. government reparations for African Americans who are descendants of U.S. slaves.

In stark contrast, a solid majority supports the German government's decision to provide reparations for Holocaust survivors (60%) and the U.S. government's decision to provide reparations for American Indians whose treaties were violated (68%). Further, only about four in 10 (43%) agreed with the U.S. Congress' decision to compensate Japanese Americans interned in camps during World War II.

However, the level of opposition to slavery reparations does not mean that Tennesseans are against all forms of compensation for descendants of U.S. slaves. For example, 50% of Tennesseans felt comfortable with the federal government issuing a formal apology to descendants of U.S. slaves. An even larger percentage (66%) felt comfortable with a federal monument acknowledging slavery's occurrence in this country, and close to three quarters of

those polled (71%) felt comfortable with a museum dedicated to educating visitors about slavery in the United States.

Rich, bright, white, and right less supportive of slavery reparations.

As expected, Tennesseans' opinions regarding reparations for African Americans who are descendants of U.S. slaves differed as a function of race. Slightly more than 66% of whites – compared to only 36% of blacks – felt comfortable with no compensation for descendants of U.S. slaves. Interestingly, blacks (63%) were a great deal more comfortable with the federal government's issuing a formal apology than whites (50%). However, there was a much smaller distance between blacks (71%) and whites (70%) who were comfortable with a museum dedicated to educating visitors about slavery in this country.

Blacks by far were more comfortable (80%) than whites (48%) with community development programs as a form of reparations, and blacks were vastly more comfortable (71%) than whites (15%) with providing individual descendants of U.S. slaves with monetary compensation as a form of reparations. Whites, however, were noticeably more comfortable (69%) than blacks (57%) with a federal monument acknowledging the occurrence of slavery in the United States.

Age, gender, education, income, political philosophy/party, and religious affiliation all influenced Tennesseans' opinions about U.S. slave reparations. For example, 71% of men but 55% of women were comfortable with “no compensation”.

Tennesseans in possession of a college degree or some college training (69%; 68%) felt more comfortable providing no compensation than Tennesseans with a high school education or less (54%). And 70% of individuals earning \$50,000 or more were comfortable with no compensation, compared with 53% of those earning less than \$15,000 annually.

Republicans and Independents were a great deal more comfortable (74%; 63%) than Democrats (53%) with providing no compensation for descendants of U.S. slaves. Similarly, Tennesseans identifying with the far right were more comfortable with no compensation (59%) than were those identifying with the far left (53%). And, of Tennesseans identifying themselves as fundamentalists or evangelicals, a heavy majority (75%; 70%) were comfortable with no compensation.

Though in the main Tennesseans were not comfortable with providing monetary compensation as a form of reparations, younger Tennesseans felt almost four times more comfortable providing monetary compensation than older Tennesseans. Here is the comfort level by age group: 18-34 age group, 30%; 35-49, 26%, 50-64 age group, 16%, and 65+ age group, 8%. Women (26%) compared with men (19%) were also noticeably more comfortable with monetary compensation. And Democrats (31%) were a great deal more comfortable providing individuals with monetary compensation than were Independents (20%) or Republicans (15%).

State financial crisis real, but most oppose income tax

A majority of Tennesseans now believe that the state faces a financial crisis, but most still oppose a state income tax. The percentage of Tennesseans who believe the state is facing a budget crunch has jumped dramatically since this spring. In March, only 47% of state residents

believed that there was a budget crisis. By this fall, the proportion had climbed to 59%, as opposed to 31% who say there is no crisis.

Although most people now believe that the state has serious budget problems, 54% of those interviewed still oppose a state income tax. Only 23% favor an income tax, while 17% say they are not sure. Even among those who believe in the budget crisis, 50% oppose an income tax. Among those who say that Tennessee is not facing a financial crisis, opposition to an income tax runs 64%.

The governor's political fortunes are strongly related to the contemplated state income tax. Overall evaluations of Don Sundquist's performance are a mixed bag: 38% of Tennessee residents approve of the way the governor is handling his job, while 44% disapprove. Tennesseans' perception of the budget crisis does not have much impact on the governor's approval rating, but support for the income tax does. Fifty-six percent of those who favor an income tax approve of the way Sundquist is handling his job as governor. In sharp contrast, 53% of those who oppose an income tax disapprove of Sundquist's performance as well.

Tennesseans' attitudes about the state government overall – though none too high – are not strongly influenced by their perception of a budget crisis. Regardless of whether they believe there is a budget crunch or not, about 16% of Tennesseans say they have a great deal of confidence in the state government. Another 59% say they have only some confidence, and 24% say they have hardly any.

Tennesseans sweating national economy, but not personal finances

Most state residents (59%) see a worsening national economy. But about as many (60%) think their personal fortunes will improve in the year to come. Both findings are consistent with national poll results. According to an October 2001 Gallup Poll, 55% of Americans say the national economy is getting worse, while half say their own finances will likely improve by next year. The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks seem to have had little effect so far on Tennesseans' perceptions of the economy. In February, the Spring 2001 Middle Tennessee Poll found that 64% of the state's residents thought the national economy was getting worse, and 57% thought their personal finances would improve during the upcoming year.

Anxiety over the national economy is more common among women than men. Among women, 63% say the national economy is getting worse. Among men, the figure is 58%. Meanwhile, 75% of Tennesseans holding a college degree express optimism about their personal finances between now and this time next year compared to 51% of less well-educated residents. And among the less well educated, residents age 49 and younger are more optimistic than those older than 49.

Sample and Method

The poll was conducted by telephone from Oct. 22 through Nov. 2, 2001, by the Office of Communication Research at Middle Tennessee State University. Communication Research faculty were responsible for the questionnaire, sampling method, and results. Trained students interviewed 614 people age 18 or older chosen at random from across Tennessee. The poll has an estimated error margin of $\pm 4\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. Theoretically, this means that a sample of this size should produce a statistical portrait of the population accurate within four

percentage points 95 out of 100 times, though the divergence is often less. Error margins are greater for sample subgroups. Other factors, such as question wording, also affect the outcome of a survey.

The sample varied somewhat from estimates for age and race proportions derived from 1999 U.S. Census Bureau figures for Tennessee residents age 18 and older. This is because certain demographic groups are difficult to contact. Our data were thus weighted to more closely match Census estimates. Here are relevant weights and percentages:

	Census	Sample	Weight	Result
Age:				
18-34	31.3%	36.2%	0.86	31.4%
35-49	31.4%	29.9%	1.05	32.0%
50-64	20.9%	22.8%	0.92	21.4%
65+	16.4%	11.1%	1.48	15.2%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
Race:				
White	82.9%	84.0%	0.99	83.7%
Black	14.9%	9.8%	1.53	14.1%
Other	2.1%	6.2%	0.34	2.2%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
Gender:				
Male	47.3%	44.5%	1.16	47.4%
Female	52.7%	55.5%	0.95	52.6%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%

The Middle Tennessee Poll, begun in 1998, is conducted twice a year. MTSU's John Seigenthaler Chair of First Amendment Studies and School of Journalism provide funding.