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Summary of Major Political Findings Fall 2003

Fewer than a third plan to play state lottery frequently, jury out on new director. Less than a third (30%) of Tennesseans say they plan to play the state's new lottery either "pretty often" or more. A majority have no opinion about the job lottery director Rebecca Paul is doing.

Majority approves of Bredeesen, but some will wait and see. A healthy 59% of Tennesseans say they approve of the job Phil Bredeesen is doing as governor. But close to one-third say they do not know how good a job the governor is doing, indicating a wait-and-see attitude.

More support an income tax with sales tax rollbacks. Majority support persists for a state income tax that includes eliminating sales taxes on groceries and cutting sales taxes on other items. Sixty-two percent now favor such a plan, compare with 58% in fall 2002.

Nashville area most optimistic about Tennessee's direction. Nearly three-fourth (73%) of Nashville MSA residents are satisfied with how things are going in Tennessee, compared with just above a majority (55%) elsewhere.

Large majority favors Workman death penalty suspension. A large majority (72%) favors Gov. Phil Bredeesen's temporary suspension of the death penalty for Phil Workman, convicted of killing a police officer in 1981.

Majority dissatisfied with national direction, economy. A heavy majority of Tennesseans (60%) are dissatisfied with the direction the country is going. Among Republicans, 39% are dissatisfied, compared to 60% of independent and other-party citizens and 80% of Democrats.

Bush approval at 51%, polarized. Just over half of Tennesseans (51%) approve of the job President Bush is doing in office, with 85% of Republicans in approval compared to only 30% of independents/other party voters and Democrats.

Other findings: Terrorism No. 1 national problem ▪ Tennesseans polarized over Iraq war ▪ Tennessee gives thumbs down to \$87 billion Iraq reconstruction ▪ State volunteers for military re-enlistment, says no to draft ▪ Networks get mediocre marks for war coverage ▪ Older Tennesseans following war closest ▪ Governor recall option popular, but "Gov. Schwarzenegger" a mistake ▪ Federal courts get the most credit for protecting free expression ▪ National TV news seen as biased, both left and right.

Details of Fall 2003 Political Findings

Fewer than a third plan to play state lottery frequently, jury also out on Paul

Less than a third (30%) of Tennesseans say they plan to play the state's new lottery either "pretty often: (20%) or "every time there's a drawing" (10%). About a third (33%) say they plan to play "rarely," and another third or so (36%) say they plan never to play. These percentages are virtually unchanged from a year ago when state voters passed a referendum authorizing the lottery.

And, as was the case a year ago, worship service attendance is the most significant factor in attitudes toward playing the lottery. Among Tennesseans who attend at least once a week, more than half (58%) say they plan never to play the lottery. By contrast, only about a third of those who either attend less often or never attend say they plan to abstain entirely from playing the lottery.

When asked, "If tomorrow you could enter a state lottery drawing for a \$100-million jackpot, how many tickets, if any, would you buy if tickets cost one dollar each," potential lottery players say they would pay an average of \$13.52. The figure excludes as an obvious outlier one individual who would pay \$1,000. The most common answer is \$5, closely followed by \$10. Seventeen percent say they would buy only a single ticket. Minorities indicate they would spend an average of \$33.27 compared to an average of \$9.70 among whites.

Newly named lottery head Rebecca Paul's performance on the job has earned the approval of 23% of the state's residents and the disapproval of 24%. But most, 51%, say they don't know whether they approve or disapprove of how she's doing her job. More whites (53%) than minorities (37%) say they don't know what to make of her job performance.

Majority approves of Bredesen, but jury still out

A healthy 59% of Tennesseans say they approve of the job Phil Bredesen is doing as governor, up a non-significant 1% from our spring survey. But close to one-third of respondents in each poll said they did not know how good a job the governor is doing, indicating that a wait-and-see attitude still persists after nine months in office.

The region of the state is important in the governor's approval rating: While 60% of Middle and East Tennessee residents approve of Bredesen, the figure drops to 43% in West Tennessee. Region is more important than political party in this respect. While more than two-thirds (67%) of Democrats approve of Bredesen, a majority (53%) of both Republicans and independents agree.

By contrast, only 40% approve of the Democratic leadership of the State Legislature. But here the party split is even greater: 67% of Democrats approve, compared with 41% of independents and 24% of Republicans.

Most still support an income tax with sales tax rollbacks

Majority support persists for a state income tax that includes eliminating sales taxes on groceries and cutting sales taxes on other items. Asked about "an income tax plan that included

ending the sales tax on groceries and lowering the sales tax on other items,” 62% of Tennesseans said either that they would favor (34%) or strongly favor (28%) such a measure. Support for a state income tax on these terms leapt to 58% in Fall 2002 – just after the Legislature enacted a one-cent increase in the state sales tax – and has remained solidly in majority territory ever since. In the present poll, 28% of Tennesseans say either that they oppose (19%) or strongly oppose (9%) an income tax on these terms, and the remaining 10% aren’t sure.

Support for an income tax plan with sales tax rollbacks is stronger among Tennesseans with a high school education or less (69% support) than among Tennesseans with at least some college education (58% support). Among the better educated group, female supporters generally outnumber male supporters.

Asked about an income tax plan “with an exemption for the first \$15,000 of each taxpayer’s income,” just about half (49%) of state residents say they either favor (33%) or strongly favor (17%) the idea. Twenty percent oppose it, and another 12% oppose it strongly. The rest aren’t sure. Regarding the idea of a flat income tax that “charged everyone the same amount per dollar of income,” 24% favor it, and 17% strongly favor it for a total of 41% support. On the other side, 29% oppose it, and 14% strongly oppose it, a total of 43% opposition. The rest say they aren’t sure.

Only 20% of Tennesseans support an income tax with no mention of a sales tax cut, an exemption or a flat rate. But 80% would support at least one aspect of an income tax plan that included all three. Just over a quarter (26%) said they were opposed to the general idea of an income tax but dropped their opposition once the inclusion of a sales tax cut, a \$15,000 exemption and a flat rate were mentioned. Another 14% said they were strongly opposed but became supporters once these concessions were mentioned, and 19% went from saying “Don’t know” to support.

Optimism is high, though, that Gov. Phil Bredesen can avoid a tax increase by solving the state’s budget problems with budget cuts and greater efficiency. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of state residents predict Bredesen will be able to fix the state’s financial problems without a tax hike. One quarter (24%) consider a tax increase necessary, and the rest aren’t sure. Those who voted in last year’s election are more optimistic about avoiding a tax cut than are those who didn’t vote. Among those who didn’t vote, optimism is highest among better-educated residents of the Middle Tennessee region.

Nashville area most optimistic about Tennessee’s direction

Residents of Nashville and the surrounding counties in the Metropolitan Statistical Area are far happier with the way things are going in Tennessee than are those living elsewhere. Nearly three-fourth (73%) of Nashville MSA residents are satisfied with how things are going, compared with just above a majority (55%) elsewhere.

And one reason for this satisfaction could be in perceptions of how the state’s economy is doing. For the Nashville MSA, 53% rate the economy fair, while 37% rate it good. Elsewhere in Tennessee, 48% rate the economy fair and less than one-fourth (23%) rate it good.

Large majority favors Workman death penalty suspension

A large majority (72%) favors Gov. Phil Bredesen's temporary suspension of the death penalty for Phil Workman, a man convicted of killing a Memphis police officer in 1981. The governor suspended the execution because a current investigation may have some bearing on Workman's guilt or innocence. Only 18% disapproved of the suspension.

Here, there is a split between self-identified liberals and middle-of-the-roaders and their conservative fellow citizens. For those in the middle and on the left, 80% approve of the suspension, but a full 65% of conservatives also approve.

A majority of Tennesseans (73%) said that it was very or somewhat likely that innocent persons could be executed. That figure is 80% among people with incomes of \$25,000 per year or less, but 68% for those who earn more.

When a random half of respondents were asked simply whether they favor the death penalty for murder, 68% said yes – a figure similar to our spring 2000 findings (67%). Another half was given a choice about what the maximum penalty for murder should be: death, life in prison without parole, or some lesser punishment. Here, the figure supporting death (56%) was significantly lower than our spring 2000 finding, where 67% opted for death. Those supporting life imprisonment climbed to one-third (33%) from 27% in 2000. The rest supported other punishments or had no opinion.

Political party and race play major roles in these findings. For the simple death penalty question, 83% of Republicans and 59% of all other citizens support the death penalty. When given the choice of other penalties, less than one-third of black citizens (27%) opt for death, compared to nearly two-thirds (61%) of whites.

Majority dissatisfied with national direction, economy

Despite Bush's majority approval rating, a heavy majority of Tennesseans (60%) are dissatisfied with the direction the country is going. Again, polarization is obvious – another indication that national unity is imperiled. Fewer than 4 in 10 Republicans (39%) express dissatisfaction, compared to 60% of independent and other-party citizens and 80% of Democrats.

Pessimism continues to prevail among Tennesseans regarding the condition of the nation's economy. Seventy-one percent of state residents consider economic conditions in the nation "only fair" (46%) or "poor" (25%). In the early spring of this year, 76% of state residents described the economy as either only fair or poor. Only about a quarter (26%) described the economy as "good," and a scant 2% said it was "excellent." Forty-eight percent see the economy as getting better, but almost as many (41%) think it's getting worse, and the remaining 10% aren't sure. Optimism is higher on the individual level, with 62% of Tennesseans predicting an improvement in their own personal fortunes during the coming year and only a quarter (24%) forecasting tougher financial times for themselves. An appreciable 14% aren't sure what the future holds for them on the financial front.

Political party identification consistently determines these attitudes, with Republicans generally expressing more economic confidence than both Democrats and Independents. For example, just over two in five Republicans (39%) describe the national economy as either "good" (39%) or "excellent" (3%). By contrast, only 16% of Democrats and Independents consider the economy "good," and less than 1% think it's "excellent." Similarly, two-thirds (66%) of Republicans say the

economy is improving, compared to just 35% of Democrats and Independents. And 81% of Republicans say their personal fortunes will improve in the coming year. Among Democrats and Independents, a bare majority (52%) see reason for optimism. Here, optimism is highest among the young and well educated. The economy appears to be a key point in attitudes toward President George W. Bush among Democrats and Independents. Among Democrats and Independents who think their own fortunes will improve in the coming year, 41% say they approve of the job Bush is doing as president, and 50% disapprove. Among Democrats and Independents who see their personal fortunes declining, though, only 19% approve, and 73% disapprove.

Slightly more than half of Tennesseans (53%) say that they will spend about the same this year for Christmas shopping. Only 15% say they plan to spend more, and a quarter (24%) plan on spending less. Males and those in the 18-34 age group indicated that they are more likely to spend more this year compared to last year. Median spending reported was about \$500.

Bush approval at 50%, polarized

Though just over half of Tennesseans (51%) approve of the job President Bush is doing in office, major polarization is obvious, and independent voters are lining up with Democrats. Thus, while 85% of Republicans approve of Bush, only 30% of independents/other party voters and Democrats agree. Independents make up 22% of our sample, while those choosing other parties make up 9%. Republicans make up about one-third (33%) and Democrats make up 30%.

Asked about the Democratic Congressional leadership, less than a third (30%) approve. A slim majority of Democrats (55%) approve, followed by 27% of Independents and other-party citizens. Only 10% of Republicans approve of the Democratic leaders in Congress.

On the question of whether they would like to see George W. Bush elected to a second term as president, 45% of Tennesseans say "yes," but just about as many (44%) say "no." The remaining 11% aren't sure. Among independents, 35% would like to return Bush to office, but 47% would not, and about 18% aren't sure. Predictably, support for Bush's re-election is highest among Republicans (86%) and lowest among Democrats (12%). Among those who would rather not re-elect Bush, a majority (52%) declined to choose as his replacement one of the candidates currently running in the Democratic presidential primary.

As is increasingly the case nationally, party identification is closely allied with religious practice here in Tennessee. Those who attend worship services "almost every week" or "once a week or more" are most likely to be Republican, and those who attend worship services less often are most likely to be either Democratic or Independent. Minorities are an exception, with most identifying themselves as Democratic regardless of worship service attendance – again, a reflection of the national pattern.

Terrorism No. 1 national problem

The economy runs a poor second to terrorism as the No. 1 national problem. One-fifth of Tennesseans (20%) named terrorism in an open-ended question regarding national issues, while 13% cited the economy.

Education and health services – listed as important state problems – received less attention here, despite the fact that both education and health are important federal and national issues. Clearly, the nation agenda is seen to be security and wellbeing.

Tennesseans also polarized over Iraq war

A majority of Tennesseans (56%) think the Iraq situation was worth going to war over, a figure similar to the 54% of all Americans surveyed by the Gallup Poll conducted Nov. 3-5. But polarization by political party is evident everywhere one looks regarding military action in Iraq.

While a huge majority of Republicans (84%) give thumbs up to the war, support drops to just over a majority among independent and other-party voters, then sinks to 26% among Democrats. And far fewer independent and Democratic women (44%, 22%) back the war than their male counterparts (70%, 35%). Our sample was 32% Republican, 32% Democratic, and 33% independent/other.

A slim majority of Tennesseans (52%) think that things are going very or moderately well for the U.S. in Iraq, while 44% think that things are going moderately or very badly. By contrast, Gallup's figures show a more cynical attitude nationwide, with 61% choosing very/moderately badly and 38% very/moderately well. Again, polarization is obvious, with 75% of Republicans picking very/moderately well, a figure that drops to 54% for independents/others, and 27% for Democrats.

Tennessee is split into rough thirds regarding whether U.S. troop strength in Iraq should be increased (25%), decreased (35%), or stay the same (31%). Political party again weighs in, with 60% of Democrats favoring a decrease in troops, while only 26% of Republicans, independents, and those with other affiliations agree.

Nearly a majority (47%) believe that the U.S. will still find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And fully 82% believe that Saddam Hussein is still alive. Only 15% of our sample thinks that the war in Iraq is essentially over with.

Tennesseans gives thumbs down to \$87 billion Iraq reconstruction

Though a majority of Tennesseans think the war was worth waging, only about one-third (34%) favor President Bush's \$87 billion grant package to reconstruct Iraq. Again, polarization is obvious, with a slim majority of Republicans (51%) favoring the package, as opposed to 31% in the independents/other party category, and 17% among Democrats.

Only 39% of Tennesseans say they feel safer now than before the Iraq war. Republicans, however, apparently feel safer than other citizens, by a good majority (59%). By contrast, only 37% of independents/others and 22% of Democrats say they feel safer than before.

Tennesseans are not, in fact, worried that they or their family will be victims of terrorist attacks. Fully 69% say they are not at all worried or not very worried about such an attack.

State volunteers for military re-enlistment, says no to draft

A full half of Volunteer state residents (50%) would urge family members to enlist or re-enlist in the military, even in the face of current casualties in Iraq. Here, race rather than politics plays a

polarizing role, with 52% of whites recommending re-enlisting, as opposed to just over a third (35%) among blacks.

But enthusiasm for military service stops short of reviving the military draft. A full 59% oppose a new draft, while just over one-third (36%) favor revival. Here, age plays a major role: 67% of those 18-49 say no, compared to 49% for those 50 and over.

Networks get mediocre marks for war coverage

Television networks garnered only midrange credibility ratings for their news coverage of the war in Iraq. The networks scored an average of 48% on a credibility scale that included measures of fairness, neutrality, thoroughness, accuracy, and trustworthiness. Gender was an important factor here, with women giving the networks an average score of 53% and men giving the networks an average score of 42%.

By contrast, the networks' error-plagued coverage of the 2000 presidential vote count in Florida averaged to 43%, while coverage in general earned a score of 44%, and coverage of the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington scored 61%.

In Spring 2002, the last time the poll measured network news credibility levels, the networks earned an average score of 44% for their coverage of the Florida vote count, 52% for their coverage in general, and 69% for their coverage of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Older Tennesseans follow war closest

Tennesseans reveals a prominent age gap regarding following news of the war in Iraq. Fully 54% of those 50 and over say they follow the war very closely, and one-third (33%) say they follow it somewhat closely. But just 37% of those 35-49 follow Iraq very closely, while 39% follow the news somewhat closely. But for those 18-35, these figures drop to 21% very closely and 37% somewhat closely.

Involvement with politics is, however, a motivating factor among the young. Among those who say they voted in last November's elections, one-third (32%) follow the war very closely and another third (33%) follow it somewhat closely. Among non-voters, those figures are 13% and 40%.

Governor recall option popular, but "Gov. Schwarzenegger" a mistake

Exactly half (50%) of Tennesseans say the state should have a law allowing voters to recall and replace a governor whose term has not yet expired. Forty three percent oppose the idea, and the rest are unsure. A recall measure is most popular among male Tennesseans who did not vote last year and least popular among younger Tennesseans who did vote last year.

These findings notwithstanding, only 30% of Tennesseans think California's decision to recall Gov. Gray Davis and elect actor Arnold Schwarzenegger in his place was a wise move. Forty-three percent consider it an unwise move, and an appreciable 27% aren't sure. Males living in Middle Tennessee are the most likely to approve of Schwarzenegger's election.

Federal courts get the most credit for protecting free expression

Tennesseans see the federal court system – especially the U.S. Supreme Court – as the chief protector of their free expressing rights. About three in five (58%) say the U.S. Supreme Court

protects their free speech rights, and 51% say their free speech rights are protected by federal courts other than the Supreme Court. Education, gender and political orientation are the most influential factors here, with males, the better educated, and all but political conservatives being the most likely to see the courts as protecting their free speech rights.

The role of political orientation becomes especially apparent when Tennesseans are asked whether federal courts have been generally hostile, neutral, or supportive toward Christianity in their rulings. Two-thirds (67%) of political conservatives say, “hostile,” compared to 49% of political moderates and 29% of liberals. Fifty-one percent of all Tennesseans describe federal court rulings as hostile to Christianity. Interestingly, though, fissures along political lines disappear when Tennesseans are asked whether they approve or disapprove of the recent federal court decision ordering an Alabama court to remove a monument to the Ten Commandments from public display in its building. Tennesseans express overwhelming (81%) disapproval of the decision, with the highest level of disapproval (96%) appearing among poorly educated nonvoters.

State courts are seen as about equally important as lower federal courts when it comes to protecting free speech. Half (50%) of Tennesseans think Tennessee’s courts protect their free speech rights. The sentiment is strongest in Middle Tennessee, where 60% feel protected by state courts. Elsewhere in the state, education is the key factor, with the better educated more likely to see state courts as important in protecting their free speech rights.

Tennesseans aren’t sure what to make of the role organizations like the American Civil Liberties Unions, the Freedom Forum or the Pew Trust play in protecting free speech. Thirty-nine percent of state residents regard the ACLU as a protector of free speech, and 34% definitely do not. But just over a quarter (26%) say they have no idea. More (61%) say they don’t know whether organizations like the Freedom Forum and the Pew Trust protect their free expressing rights. Seventeen percent say such organizations do protect free speech. Eighteen percent say such organizations don’t. Political orientation is a helpful variable here, with those on the political left most confident that the ACLU protects their free expression rights, and liberals and moderates both more likely than conservatives to see organizations like the Freedom Forum and the Pew Center as protecting free speech rights.

Print and broadcast news organizations get the least credit for protecting Tennesseans’ free speech rights. Only about a third (38%) agree that newspapers protect one’s personal free speech rights. Forty-nine percent say “no,” and about 13% aren’t sure. Television news operations fare even worse. Thirty-one percent of state residents feel their personal free speech rights are protected by TV news operations. Over half (52%) say TV news operations do not protect one’s personal free speech rights, and about 17% aren’t sure.

National TV news seen as biased, both left and right

Tennesseans say there is a liberal bias in national television news—and a conservative bias as well. Respondents believe that a liberal political bias exists at CNN, ABC and CBS while they say a conservative bias exists at Fox News.

Those who have taken some college courses along with those holding college degrees were more likely to believe that CNN was politically “liberal” or “somewhat liberal” (53%) than were those with a high school diploma or less education (33%).

Forty percent of Republicans said that Fox News was “conservative” or “somewhat

conservative” while Democrats were less inclined (25%) to view it as such. That network’s claim of “Fair and Balanced” news was supported by just 20% of respondents, labeling it’s news as “neutral” in terms of political bias, while 30% said they didn’t know if there was a left or right leaning at Fox. Nineteen percent said Fox was "liberal" or "somewhat liberal."

Only one national news program among the selections was perceived to be politically to the “right” of Fox News—religious broadcaster Pat Robertson’s 700 Club. College graduates were more likely (45%) to view the broadcast as “conservative” or “somewhat conservative” while 24% of those with less than a college degree viewed it as such.

NBC and MSNBC were viewed as “somewhat liberal” while PBS and local television news was found to be closest to “neutral” politically.

Over half (56%) of Tennesseans polled think patients bring too many lawsuits against doctors. Race is a key factor in this attitude. About 60% of whites think there are too many medical malpractice lawsuits, and 40% of minorities think there are too few.

Fully 60% of Tennesseans favor restricting the amount of money awarded to patients who win a malpractice lawsuit as a way of lowering the cost of doctor’s insurance. Older (72% of those age 50-64 and above), more conservative (69%) Tennesseans overwhelmingly tend to support such caps on malpractice awards.

Sample and Method

The poll was conducted Oct. 20 through Nov. 8, 2003 by students in the College of Mass Communication working under the direction of The Survey Group at Middle Tennessee State University. The poll was conducted in two waves, each with different batteries of items as well as some duplicate items.

For the first wave, which concluded Nov. 1, students interviewed 609 people age 18 or older from across the state whose telephone numbers were chosen at random by a computer. The first wave findings have an estimated error margin of ± 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Theoretically, this means that a sample of this size should produce a statistical portrait of the state population within 4 percentage points 95 out of 100 times. During the second wave, which concluded Nov. 1, students interviewed 395 people age 18 or older from across the state whose telephone numbers were chosen at random by a computer. For these findings, the error margin of ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Other factors, such as question wording also affect the outcome of a survey. Error margins are greater for sample subgroups.

The samples for both waves 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 relevant percentages for each wave:

	Census	First Wave			Second Wave		
		Sample	Weight	Result	Sample	Weight	Result
Age:							
18-34	29.9%	28.0%	1.07	31.7%	26.8%	1.12	31.8%
35-49	30.6%	29.7%	1.03	30.2%	30.9%	0.99	31.3%
50-64	23.0%	27.0%	0.85	22.2%	25.0%	0.92	21.7%
65+	16.5%	15.2%	1.09	16.0%	17.3%	0.96	15.3%
	100.0%	99.9%		100.1%	100.0%		100.1%
Race:							
White	83.8%	89.6%	0.94	84.1%	88.3%	0.95	83.6%
Black	15.0%	6.8%	2.20	14.6%	7.4%	2.02	15.0%
Other	1.2%	3.6%	0.35	1.3%	4.3%	0.29	1.5%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%		100.1%
Gender:							
Male	47.4%	45.3%	1.05	46.0%	43.8%	1.08	47.0%
Female	52.6%	54.7%	0.96	54.0%	56.2%	0.94	53.0%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%		100.0%