

## Summary of Findings, Spring 2006

**Most don't want another Bush; divided on next Congress.** A majority (58%) do not want the next president to be similar to President Bush, but they split into thirds over which party should control the next Congress and should win Bill Frist's U.S. Senate seat. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**Bush's overall approval remains in the tank.** Just 42% of Tennesseans approve of the job President Bush is doing, while 52% disapprove. This is marginally but not significantly different from our fall findings, where 40% approved. Partisan splits here are deep. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**But Bush approval nears majority on Supreme Court, terrorism, wiretaps.** There are bright spots for Bush in the state. A majority approve of Bush's actions on Supreme Court nominations, the campaign against terrorism, and unauthorized post-9/11 wiretaps. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**Evangelicals' expectations of conservative policy change continue to decline.** As President Bush's approval ratings have declined, so have state evangelicals' expectations that he will deliver policy changes hoped for by the religious right. (*Contact: Ken Blake*).

**War in Iraq/Afghanistan No. 1 national problem.** One-fourth (25%) rate the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan as the No. 1 problem. The economy comes second at 12%, followed by morals and family values at 11% and President Bush himself at 10%. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**Despite Iraq war doubts, Tennesseans hawkish on Iran, Palestinian Authority.** Despite a general sense that the war in Iraq was a mistake, Tennesseans react hawkishly when asked how the U.S. should respond to Iran's nuclear program. (*Contact: Ken Blake*).

**Tennessee barometer trumps national reading.** As in the fall, we reports two "barometer" indexes of perceptions of the overall state and national climate. This spring, the Tennessee index stands at 51, identical with the fall, while the national index is 37, up three points from fall. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**Less than a third satisfied with national direction.** Only 31% of Tennesseans are satisfied with the way things are going in the nation, while 63% are dissatisfied. Again, the partisan split is deep. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**Majority rate national economy only fair or poor.** Nearly two-thirds of Tennesseans rate the national economy only fair (42%) or poor (22%). But about a third rate (33%) the economy good, though just 4% give it an excellent mark. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt*).

**State divided on whether illegal immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens.** About half (46%) of Tennesseans think undocumented immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens, while another half (48%) say illegal immigrants mostly take jobs that U.S. citizens don't want or can't do. (*Contact: Ken Blake*).

## Details of Findings, Spring 2006

### **Tennesseans don't want another Bush; divided on next Congress, senator**

Despite their conservatism and their approval of Bush on a few important domestic issues, Tennesseans are certain that they do not want the next president to be like George Bush. They are also closely divided about the partisan makeup of the next Congress and are split about whether they want their next senator to be a Republican or a Democrat.

A solid majority (58%) do not want the next president to be similar to Bush, though just more than a third (35%) prefer a Bush-like chief executive. The partisan divide is deep. Fully 70% of Republicans want someone similar to Bush, while only 24% of independents and 33% of those identifying no party agree. Just 4% of Democrats want someone like Bush.

Tennesseans are split 38% to 35% about whether they want the next Congress to be controlled by Republicans. Fully 83% of Republicans want a Republican Congress, compared to 26% of independents and those with no identification. Only 2% of Democrats prefer a Republican Congress.

Concerning their next senator, Tennesseans are split 30% to 30% about whether they want a Democrat or a Republican. And fully 39% don't know which they prefer at this point.

A full 71% of Republicans want a Republican, while 74% of Democrats want a Democrat. But the jury is out for all others, including independents – with a strong majority (57%) saying they don't yet know what they want.

Thus, the president's current problems seem to have deepened the polarization between Republicans and independents and increased the alienation of Democrats.

### **Bush's overall approval remains in the tank**

Just 42% of Tennesseans approve of the job President Bush is doing, while 52% disapprove. This is marginally but not significantly different from our fall findings, where 40% approved. Thus, the main damage seems to have been done between last spring and the fall. A year ago, Bush's approval stood at a healthy 55% in the MTSU Poll.

The partisan split here is obvious. An overwhelming 82% of Republicans approve of Bush's performance, followed at a distance by 38% giving no affiliation, then 27% of independents and 7% of Democrats.

### **But Bush approval nears majority on Supreme Court, terrorism, wiretaps**

There are, however, several bright spots for Bush among Tennesseans. On specific items such as the handling of Supreme Court nominations, the general campaign against terrorism, and unauthorized post-9/11 wiretaps, nearly a majority approve of his actions. In fact, fully 53% approve of Bush's actions on the wiretaps, 49% approve of his handling of the campaign against terrorism, and 48% approve of his performance on Supreme Court nominations.

Splits along party lines are predictable. While only 21% of Democrats approve of wiretaps, just over half of independents (51%) approve, compared with a solid 84% of Republicans. For the handling of terrorism, 17% of Democrats approve, followed by 42% of independents and others.

But 83% of Republicans approve. For Supreme Court nominations, 80% of Republicans approved, followed by 43% of independents and those refusing to answer, 38% of others, and just 21% of Democrats.

Clearly, the source of poor ratings for Bush's overall job performance must be found elsewhere, perhaps in the handling of Iraq, the economy, and the general direction of the nation.

### **Evangelicals' expectations of conservative policy change continue to decline**

As President Bush's approval ratings have declined, so have what were already-low expectations among the state's evangelical Christians that he will deliver policy changes hoped for by the religious right. Tennessee evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Bush in the 2004 election and helped him carry the state. About 63% of Tennesseans describe themselves as evangelical or "born again" Christians. Nationwide, the proportion is about 40%, according to a February poll by The Associated Press.

Last spring, for example, when Bush's approval rating stood at a comfortable 55% statewide and 62% among evangelicals, 42% of all Tennesseans – and 50% of evangelicals – thought Bush would amend the U.S. Constitution to ban gay marriage. Today, only about a third in each group – 31% of all Tennesseans and 36% of Tennessee evangelicals – think Bush will do so. Similarly, 27% of all Tennesseans and 30% of Tennessee evangelicals predict Bush will end limits on displaying the 10 Commandments in government buildings. Last spring, the figure was 35% statewide and 41% among evangelicals.

On school prayer, about equal proportions of Tennesseans in general (23%) and evangelicals in particular (24%) think Bush will end limits on school prayer. Last spring, 31% of all Tennesseans and 35% of evangelicals thought Bush would do so. And despite Bush's success at naming two Supreme Court justices, predictions that Bush will outlaw abortion rank the lowest of all. Just 17% of Tennesseans in general – and 17% of Tennessee evangelicals – think Bush will outlaw abortion. Last spring, 26% of all Tennesseans and 34% of Tennessee evangelicals thought so.

Evangelicals remain highly supportive personally of these changes, though, as do most Tennesseans in general. Fully 80% of evangelicals say the law should not recognize gay marriage. Similarly, 86% think abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances (63%) or illegal in all circumstances (23%). The law should allow daily prayer in public schools, according to 87% of evangelicals, and 92% of evangelicals would approve of displaying a monument to the 10 Commandments in a public school or governmental building.

Among Tennesseans in general, 69% say the law should not recognize gay marriages, 62% say abortion should be legal under only certain circumstances (and 20% choose illegal in all circumstances), 79% favor allowing daily school prayer, and 82% favor allowing displays of the 10 Commandments in schools and public buildings.

Taken together, these findings cast doubt on the common perception that evangelicals in Tennessee – and perhaps like-minded evangelical Christians nationwide – support Bush because they believe he will enact religiously conservative political policies. Last spring's poll found a much stronger association among evangelicals between supporting Bush and believing that having Bush – who makes frequent, public mentions of his evangelical Christian beliefs – in the White House would "cause others to take religious faith more seriously." But the current poll finds that even this perception has declined among evangelicals. Under half (44%) of evangelicals and 39% of all Tennesseans now think Bush's presence in the White House will

encourage others to take religious faith more seriously. Last spring, the figure was 53% among evangelicals and 42% among all Tennesseans.

Due in part, perhaps, to these shifts, overall approval of Bush among the state's evangelicals has dropped from 62% last spring to 48% today.

### **War in Iraq/Afghanistan No. 1 national problem**

One-fourth (25%) of all Tennesseans rate the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan as the No. 1 problem confronting American. The economy comes second at 12%, followed by morals and family values at 11% and President Bush himself at 10%.

Party identification is the most important predictor of perceptions regarding the nation's biggest problem. Thus, fully 26% of non-Republicans – including Democrats and independents – name the war as the lead problem in open-ended questions where a consensus of 20% is normally considered a high. And even 20% of Republicans concur.

Attitudes toward the war in Iraq remain negative among many Tennesseans. Forty-eight percent of the state's residents say the war was a mistake, a figure statistically identical to the 49% figure found in last fall's poll. As was the case then, attitudes divide sharply along party lines, with 85% of Democrats characterizing the war as a mistake compared to 57% of independents and 18% of Republicans.

### **Despite Iraq war doubts, Tennesseans hawkish on Iran, Palestinian Authority**

Despite a general sense that the war in Iraq was a mistake, Tennesseans react hawkishly when asked how the U.S. should respond to Iran's nuclear program.

A majority (56%) of Tennesseans say they would support U.S. military action against Iran if Iran continues to produce materials that can be used to develop nuclear weapons. About a quarter (26%) would not support U.S. military action against Iran under those conditions, and 17% don't know. The rest declined to answer. Most Americans concur, according to a January *Los Angeles Times* poll. That poll found that 57% of Americans would support military action, while 33% would not, and 10% don't know.

In Tennessee, men register proportionally more support for war against Iran (60%) than do women (52%). Among women, Republicans would be more supportive (62%), while Independents and Democrats (44%). Among men, meanwhile, 69% of evangelical Christians would support a war against Iran compared to 47% of non-evangelicals.

Tennesseans are less willing than Americans in general, though, to engage the Hamas-dominated Palestinian Authority in diplomacy. Just over a third (38%) of Tennesseans think the U.S. should engage the Palestinian Authority in diplomacy in the hope of coaxing the Authority into renouncing violence. Nationally, 51% of Americans support such diplomacy, according to a late January poll by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal. About equal proportions of Tennesseans (38%) and Americans as a whole (37%) think the U.S. should refuse to deal with the Authority until the Authority renounces violence, but more Tennesseans (22%) than Americans (12%) say they don't know.

Here, again, males and females in Tennessee differ, with more men (44%) than women (34%) favoring diplomatic hardball with the Authority and more women (29%) than men (13%) saying they're unsure.

### **Tennessee barometer trumps national reading**

As in the fall, the MTSU Poll is reporting two new “barometer” indexes to measure citizen perceptions of the overall state and national climate. This spring, the Tennessee index stands once again at 51, identical with the fall, while the national index sits at 37, up three points from fall.

The three-item barometric indices are calculated from attitudes toward the governor or the President, the state or the national economy, and “how things are going” in Tennessee or the nation. The top score is 100; an analysis of the individual items in the scale appears in following sections.

In both the state and the nation, the barometer is best predicted by political allegiances. For Tennessee, conservatives rate the state barometer 65, moderates and the far left 52, and liberals, the far right, and all others at 35. For the national barometer, ratings stand at 72 for Republicans, 32 for independents and others, and only 7 for Democrats.

These results indicate that those who rate the state of the state and nation high tend to inhabit separate economic and political worlds.

The MTSU Poll also reported a state barometer only in spring 2003, when the index stood at 53, not much of a difference from the current 51.

### **Less than a third satisfied with national direction**

Only 31% of Tennesseans are satisfied with the way things are going in the nation, while 63% are dissatisfied.

Again, the partisan split is deep. Although 53% of Republicans are satisfied, only 8% of Democrats and 27% of all others agree that things are going well in the nation.

### **Majority rate national economy only fair or poor**

Nearly two-thirds of Tennesseans rate the national economy only fair (42%) or poor (22%). But about a third (33%) rate the economy good, though just 4% give it an excellent mark.

The familiar partisan split exists here, too. While 64% of Republicans rate the economy good, just 7% of Democrats agree. Here, as elsewhere, independents and those who profess no allegiance fall in between, with 27% rating the economy good.

### **State divided on whether illegal immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens**

Tennesseans divide evenly on the question of what impact illegal immigrants to the United States have on job availability. About half (46%) think undocumented immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens, while another half (48%) say illegal immigrants mostly take jobs that U.S. citizens don't want or can't do. The rest don't know or decline to answer. Education is a key predictor here, with about half (51%) of Tennesseans who do not have a college degree saying that illegal immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens compared to just over a third (38%) of college-educated Tennesseans.

These attitudes remain virtually unchanged compared to spring 2004, when a similarly phrased MTSU Poll question found that 47% of Tennesseans thought undocumented immigrants took desirable jobs and 47% thought such immigrants did not take desirable jobs. Then, as now, education was a key predictor of attitudes, with lesser-educated Tennesseans seeing illegal immigrants as more of a threat to jobs.

Tennesseans' attitudes on the issue are uncharacteristically out of step with those across the nation. Nationally, 36% of Americans think illegal immigrants take desirable jobs from U.S. citizens, while 56% think illegal immigrants take jobs U.S. citizens don't want or can't do, according to a January poll by *Time* magazine. On national issues, Tennesseans' attitudes tend to match those of Americans as a whole.

### **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. 13-25, 2006 by students in the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. Students interviewed 626 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	29.3%	22.7%	1.29	29.8%
35-49	29.9%	28.4%	1.05	29.6%
50-64	24.2%	29.5%	0.82	24.0%
65+	16.7%	19.4%	0.86	16.5%
	100.0%	100.0%		99.9%
<b>Race:</b>				
White	83.6%	85.7%	0.98	82.5%
Black	15.1%	9.1%	1.66	16.0%
Other	1.3%	5.2%	0.25	1.5%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
<b>Gender:</b>				
Male	47.5%	47.0%	1.01	46.9%
Female	52.5%	53.0%	0.99	53.1%
	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.