

Spring 2007 Second Release

Non-denominational, mainline score higher than Evangelicals, fundamentalists. More Tennesseans say they approve of non-denominational Christians (52%) and mainline Protestants (41%) than Evangelicals (32%) or fundamentalists (24%), despite the state's reputation as the buckle of the Bible Belt. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt.*)

Approval of Bredesen, Legislature trending upward. Over two-thirds (67%) of Tennesseans approve of how Phil Bredesen is handling his job as governor, up substantially from the 57% approval rating he received in last fall's poll conducted weeks before his election to a second term. Approval of the state Legislature is up as well, with 50% expressing approval in the current poll compared to 40% in last fall's pre-election poll. (*Contact: Ken Blake.*)

Majority supports death penalty, plurality back temporary suspension. A majority (57%) of Tennesseans support death as the maximum penalty for murder, but about one-third (32%) opt for life imprisonment without parole. And 42% approve of Gov. Phil Bredesen's suspension of executions pending a review of Tennessee's lethal injection procedures. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt.*)

Most think global warming serious, many think Gore should add Nobel to Oscar. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of Tennesseans think global warming is making a serious impact on the climate now. And nearly half (48%) think former Vice President Al Gore deserves a Nobel Prize for his work against global warming. Gore has already won an Oscar. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt.*)

Health care No. 1 state problem, again up from fall; race a factor. More than one-fourth (27%) of Tennesseans named health care and health insurance as the state's No. 1 problem in an open-ended question, up from 19% last fall. And 29% of whites named health No. 1, compared with 17% of blacks. For blacks, crime is No.1, with a 25% mention. (*Contact: Ken Blake.*)

Most support pre-trial screening of medical malpractice suits. Most Tennesseans (65%) say malpractice suits filed against health care providers should be required to pass a review by medical experts before being heard by a jury. A plurality of 45% support a state-imposed limit on the amount of money patients can receive in punitive damages when suing health care providers. (*Contact: Ken Blake.*)

State mood looking up again; things rosier for wealthier. Things are looking up again in the state, with our Tennessee barometer standing at a new high of 63 out of 100. The measure stood at 61 in our spring 2006 survey. (*Contact: Bob Wyatt.*)

Details of Findings, Spring 2007

Non-denominational, mainline believers rate higher than Evangelicals, fundamentalists (contact Bob Wyatt at 615-477-8389)

More Tennesseans say they approve of non-denominational Christians (52%) and mainline Protestants (41%) than Evangelicals (32%) or fundamentalists (24%), despite the state's reputation as the buckle of the Bible Belt.

But between about 40% and half of those questioned said they either had no opinion or didn't know how they felt about any of the seven religious labels we measured – indicating that the terms are even harder to define than the various denominational categories that Christians say they belong to.

Surprisingly, Tennesseans gave similarly low approval ratings to the Christian right (32%) and liberal Protestants (31%). Pentecostals – arguably as close to a denominational category as the general term Baptists – received 37% approval.

Approval of non-denominational Christians was highest (56%) among respondents who said they were “born again.” For those who said they were not born again, the figure was 47%. This is not surprising, as the term “non-denominational” is often associated with large congregations with distinct Evangelical and Baptist practices and beliefs.

Education is the best predictor of approval for mainline Protestants. Fully 56% of college graduates and those with some graduate work approved, compared to 43% with some trade school or college and only 27% of those who are high school graduates or less. Again, this is not surprising, as mainline churches such as Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and Lutherans are often associated with higher educational levels.

Approval of Evangelicals is also best predicted by being born again (43%) as opposed to those who say they are not born again (23%). Again, the finding is not surprising

Opinion of fundamentalists and liberal Protestants is best predicted by political orientation, again not unusual, given the political resonance of these terms. For fundamentalists, 37% of conservatives and those on the far ends of the political spectrum approve, compared to only 16% of liberals, middle-of-the-roaders, and others.

But for liberal Protestants, the odd thing is the high number of don't knows (52%) for liberals and centrists versus conservatives and those at the extremes (38%). Here, approval ratings are virtually identical (32% and 30%), but disapproval is far lower for liberals and centrists (12%) than the other groups (31%).

For Pentecostals, again self-classification as being born again is the best predictor, with 47% of those born again approving but only 28% of those who say they are not.

Approval of Bredesen, Legislature trending upward
(contact Ken Blake at 615-210-6187)

Over two-thirds (67%) of Tennesseans approve of how Phil Bredesen is handling his job as governor, up substantially from the 57% approval rating he received in last fall's poll conducted weeks before his election to a second term. Just 18% disapprove of the governor's job performance, and the remaining 15% aren't sure.

Approval of the state Legislature is up as well, with 50% expressing approval in the current poll, compared to 40% in last fall's pre-election poll. About a quarter (24%) of Tennesseans say they disapprove the job the Legislature is doing, and the rest – a sizable 26% – aren't sure.

As in previous polls, Bredesen fares well across the political spectrum, enjoying majority support among liberals, moderates and conservatives as well as Democrats, independents, and Republicans. Setting aside political considerations, income makes the next biggest difference, with Tennesseans earning over \$50,000 a year in household income showing more support than those with lower household incomes, although here, too, the governor enjoys majority support among both groups.

Age makes the biggest difference in approval of the Legislature, with Tennesseans age 18-34 tending to express less approval of – and more indecision toward – the Legislature compared to older Tennesseans.

Majority supports death penalty, plurality approves temporary suspension
(contact Bob Wyatt at 615-477-8389)

A majority (57%) of Tennesseans support death as the maximum penalty for murder, but about one-third (32%) opt for life imprisonment without parole. Those figures are virtually identical with our 2003 poll, after Gov. Phil Bredesen had temporarily suspended the death penalty of convicted murderer Phil Workman, who was later executed.

Race is a major predictor of support for the death penalty, with 64% of whites but only 18% of blacks preferring death as the appropriate punishment for murder.

Among whites, political party is also important. While 76% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents support the death penalty, 57% of other independents and Democrats agree.

Today, a plurality (42%) approve of Gov. Phil Bredesen's suspension of executions pending a review of Tennessee's lethal injection procedures. About one-third disapprove (32%), and more than one-fourth said they have no opinion (27%).

Concerning halting lethal injections, education is the best predictor, with only 29% of those with high school diplomas or less approving, compared to 50% of those with some college or trade school or more education.

Florida halted lethal injections after a December incident in which the person executed seemed to exhibit pain during after his injection.

Most think global warming serious, many think Gore should add Nobel to Oscar

(contact Bob Wyatt at 615-477-8389)

Nearly two-thirds (60%) of Tennesseans think global warming is making a serious impact on the climate now, though 28% disagree. Only 11%, however, have no opinion on the issue.

And nearly half (48%) think former Vice President Al Gore deserves a Nobel Prize for his work against global warming. Gore has already won an Oscar for the film, "An Inconvenient Truth."

This 48% contrasts with the 42% that had a favorable rating of Gore as a presidential candidate in this poll. Fully 43% said they had an unfavorable rating of Gore.

Political orientation is the best predictor of attitudes toward global warming, with 67% of liberals, middle-of-the-roaders and others saying it is making a serious impact now. For Gore's Nobel, fully 72% of Democrats say yes, compared to 29% of Republicans and 42% of independents and others.

Health care No. 1 state problem again, up from fall; race a factor

(contact Bob Wyatt at 615-477-8389)

More than one-fourth (27%) of Tennesseans named health care and health insurance as the state's No. 1 problem in an open-ended question, up from 19% last fall. Education places second at 21%, also up from fall's 15%. They are followed by crime at a distant 7% and immigration at 6%.

Race again is an important predictor, with 29% of whites naming health No. 1, compared with 17% of blacks. For blacks, crime is No. 1 at 25%, while among whites crime is mentioned by only 4%. The contrast of challenges facing blacks and whites is stark.

Most support pre-trial screening of medical malpractice suits

(contact Ken Blake at 615-210-6187)

Most Tennesseans (65%) say malpractice suits filed against health care providers should be required to pass a review by medical experts before being heard by a jury. A quarter (25%) opposes requiring such a review, and the rest aren't sure.

Furthermore, 45% support a state-imposed limit on the amount of money patients can receive in punitive damages when suing health care providers – fewer, but still a plurality compared to the 38% who oppose limiting punitive damages and the 17% who aren't sure.

Attitudes toward capping punitive damages in malpractice suits break along political ideology lines, perhaps because political leaders have provided relatively abundant cues on the issue. Fully 65% of Tennesseans who describe themselves as conservative or far right favor limiting punitive damages. Forty-three percent of those in the political middle agree, and just 25% of those who are liberal or far left. Among those on the left, geography makes a difference, with East Tennesseans showing more support for limits than Middle and West Tennesseans.

Attitudes toward requiring malpractice suits to pass a pre-trial review by medical experts – an idea that has received relatively less public discussion – divide by age. For example, 73% of Tennesseans age 18-34 support pre-trial screening of malpractice suits compared to 66% of Tennesseans age 65 or older. In all age groups, though, majorities favor the idea. Increased

experience with the healthcare system among older residents may drive these differences, although the poll did not include questions about such experience.

State mood looking up again; things rosier for wealthier

(contact Bob Wyatt at 615-477-8389)

Things are looking up again in the state, with the Tennessee barometer standing at a new high of 63 out of 100. Although the rise is not significantly higher than last fall's 61, the measure is up markedly from 51 in spring 2006.

The state barometer is based on an index computed from the rating of the governor, the perception of the state economy, and the direction the state seems to be going in.

Not surprisingly, there is quite a barometer gap between that half of Tennesseans with a household income of \$25,000 or less, where the scale stands at 54. For those making more than \$15,000, the figure is 72.

Fully 55% say they are satisfied with the way things are going in the state now. Only 4% rate the state's economy as excellent, while 38 rate it as good, 43 as fair, and 12% as poor.

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. 6-17, 2007 by students in the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. Students interviewed 554 people age 18 or older chosen at random from the state population. The poll has an estimated error margin of \pm about 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:

The MTSU Poll Second Release, Spring 2007, p. 7

	Census	Sample	Weight	Result
Age:				
18-34	28.9%	21.0%	1.38	29.9%
35-49	29.6%	26.5%	1.12	29.4%
50-64	24.8%	32.1%	0.77	23.7%
65+	16.8%	20.4%	0.82	17.1%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.1%
Race:				
White	83.6%	88.3%	0.95	82.6%
Black	15.1%	7.3%	2.07	15.8%
Other	1.3%	4.4%	0.30	1.6%
	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
Gender:				
Male	47.5%	52.3%	0.91	46.8%
Female	52.5%	47.7%	1.10	53.2%
	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.