



**Ken Blake**, Ph.D., Director of the MTSU Poll, (615) 210-6187  
**Robert Wyatt**, Ph.D., Director of Communication Research, (615) 477-8389  
**Jason Reineke**, Ph.D., Associate Director of the MTSU Poll, (615) 494-7746

E-mail: [kblake@mtsu.edu](mailto:kblake@mtsu.edu)  
[rwyatt@mtsu.edu](mailto:rwyatt@mtsu.edu)  
[jreineke@mtsu.edu](mailto:jreineke@mtsu.edu)

## **MTSU Poll National Political Report, Spring 2010**

**President Obama's job approval continues to decline among Tennesseans.** For the first time since Barack Obama's inauguration, a majority of Tennesseans disapprove of the job he is doing as president. In further contrast to past poll results, a majority of the state's independents now disapprove of Obama as well. Worry about their families' financial futures seems to be driving independents' disapproval. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**Tennesseans' confidence in Obama administration mixed across fronts.** Most Tennesseans express little or no confidence in the administration's ability to improve the economy or reform health care. But most say that they are confident in the administration's ethical standards and ability to manage foreign policy. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**Frozen Washington: Neither Obama nor Republicans doing enough to work together.** A plurality of Tennesseans say President Obama isn't doing enough to cooperate with Congressional Republicans, and a majority say Republicans aren't doing enough to work with Obama. Beliefs about Obama's cooperation break along party lines. Most independents who get their news from Fox think he's not doing enough, while those who get news from other sources think that he is. But even self-identified Tennessee Republicans think Congressional Republicans aren't doing enough to cooperate. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**Tennessee approves of Obama's Response to Haiti earthquake.** Most Tennesseans approve of President Obama's response to the earthquake in Haiti, but that approval doesn't seem to have an impact on approval of Obama's overall job performance. In contrast, when Tennesseans disapproved of then-President Bush's handling of the response to hurricane Katrina, it played an important role in changing overall approval of Bush's job performance to disapproval. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

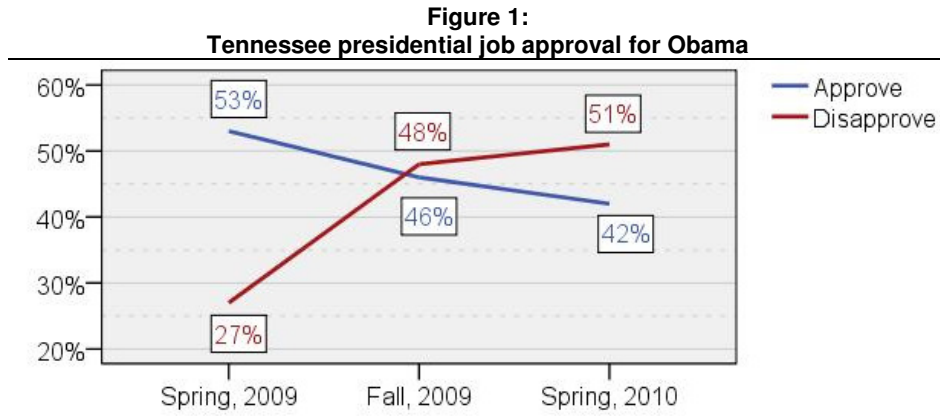
**Health reform: Most Tennesseans want a do-over.** Most Tennesseans think Congress should scrap what they've done so far and start work on a new health reform bill, including majorities of independents and Republicans. A plurality of Democrats say Congress should pass something like it is considering now. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**Iraq a mistake that's going well, Afghanistan the right choice but progress uncertain.** Most say that it was a mistake to send U.S. troops to Iraq, but that the war there is going well now. Following the announcement of a major deployment of additional troops to Afghanistan, Tennesseans are ambivalent on that war's progress, but most say it was the right decision to send troops there in the first place. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**Citizens United v. F.E.C: Tennesseans just not sure in debate about corporate speech.** Residents ambivalence on the decision and its underlying principles. *(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

**President Obama’s job approval continues to decline among Tennesseans**  
*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

For the first time since Barack Obama’s inauguration, a majority of Tennessean’s say they disapprove of the job he is doing as President. Fifty-one percent disapprove, while only 42 percent say they approve, with the remaining 7 percent saying that they don’t know or refusing to answer the question. The difference between those who approve and those who disapprove in Tennessee is outside the MTSU poll’s margin of error, meaning that clearly more Tennesseans disapprove of Obama’s job performance than approve.



For comparison, according to pollster.com’s aggregation of national polls as of February 27, 2010, 48 percent of Americans currently approve of the job Obama is doing as president, and 47 percent disapprove.

Approval breaks as expected along party lines with 84 percent of Democrats saying they approve while only 16 percent disapprove and 90 percent of Republicans saying that they disapprove while only 10 percent approve. However, in a marked difference from last fall’s poll<sup>1</sup>, a majority of Tennessee’s independents, fully 60 percent, now say that they disapprove of the job Obama is doing as president while only 40 percent approve. Thirty percent of the sample identified themselves as Democrats, 31 percent as Republicans, and 36 percent as independents, with the remaining participants saying they didn’t know their partisan identification or refusing to answer the question.

**Table 1:**  
**“Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?”**

	Approve	Disapprove
Tennessee Overall	42 %	51 %
Nation Overall	48 %	47 %
Tennessee		
Democrats	84 %	16 %
Republicans	10 %	90 %
Independents	40 %	60 %

National percentage estimates from pollster.com

<sup>1</sup> In the fall 2009 MTSU poll, 49 percent of independents approved of the job Obama was doing as president, and 43 percent disapproved.

For independents, the main factor in presidential job approval is their perception of their families' future financial security. Among the 42 percent of independents who say they are not at all worried or not too worried about their family's financial well being over the next few years, 51 percent approve of the job Obama is doing as president while 49 percent disapprove. But among the 58 percent of independents who say they are either somewhat or very worried about their family's financial well being over the next few years, 69 percent disapprove of the job Obama was doing as president while only 31 percent approve.

**Tennesseans' confidence in Obama administration mixed across fronts**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Tennesseans express a lack of confidence when it comes to the Obama administration's two signature domestic policy issues. Only 46 percent of Tennesseans say they are very or somewhat confident in the administration's ability to improve the economy, while 52 percent say that they're not too or not at all confident. Two percent don't know how confident they are in the administration's ability to improve the economy or refuse to answer the question.

There is even less confidence in the Obama administration's ability to reform health care, with only 35 percent saying they are very or somewhat confident in the administration's ability to reform health care and fully 63 percent saying they are either not too or not at all confident. The remaining respondents say that they don't know how confident they are in the administration's ability to reform health care or refuse to answer the question.

However, in terms of ethics and foreign policy, most Tennesseans express confidence in the Obama administration. Fifty-five percent say that they are either somewhat or very confident in the Obama administration's ethical standards, while only 35 percent say they are either not too or not at all confident in the administration's ethics. The remaining 10 percent either say they don't know what they think about the administration's ethical standards or refuse to answer the question.

When asked about the Obama administration's ability to manage American foreign policy, 51 percent of Tennesseans say they are very or somewhat confident in the administration, with only 40 percent saying they are either not too or not at all confident. The remaining 9 percent say that they don't know how confident they are in the administration's ability to manage American foreign policy or refuse to answer the questions.

**Frozen Washington: Neither Obama, Republicans doing enough to work together**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

At 49 percent, a plurality of Tennesseans say President Barack Obama is not doing enough to cooperate with Republicans in Congress. Only 40 percent say that Obama is doing enough to cooperate. The remaining poll participants say they don't know whether Obama is doing enough or refused to answer the question. Responses break predictably according to party identification, with 82 percent of Democrats saying that Obama is doing enough to cooperate while only 18 percent say he is not, and 89 percent of Republicans saying he's not doing enough while only 11 percent say that he is. Among independents, 59 percent say Obama isn't doing enough to cooperate, while 41 percent say that he is.

Among independents, opinions of whether Obama is doing enough to cooperate with Republicans in Congress seem to be driven primarily by the television news outlet the individual watches most often. Among the 37 percent of independents who watch Fox News most often,

79 say Obama is not doing enough to cooperate with Republicans while only 21 percent say that he is. But among the 63 percent of independents who watch some other television news outlet most frequently, 52 percent say that Obama is doing enough to cooperate, while 48 percent say that he is not.

A sizeable majority of Tennesseans, 70 percent, say that Republicans in Congress are not doing enough to work with President Obama, while only 18 percent say that they are. The remaining 12 percent say they don't know whether Republicans in Congress are doing enough to cooperate or refuse to answer the question. Furthermore, this opinion persists across party lines – 94 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of independents, and even 66 percent of self-identified Republicans all say that Republicans in Congress are not doing enough to cooperate with President Obama as compared to 6, 21, and 34 percent, respectively, who say that congressional Republicans are doing enough to cooperate with the President.

### **Tennessee approves of Obama's Response to Haiti earthquake**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Seventy-seven percent of Tennesseans approve of how President Barack Obama is handling the response to the earthquake in Haiti. Only 10 percent disapprove; the remaining 13 percent either don't know how they feel about the response or refuse to answer the question. As a rough comparison, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, only 44 percent of Tennesseans approved of how then-President George W. Bush was handling the response to that natural disaster, with 48 percent who disapproved and 8 percent who didn't know or refused to answer the question. Although disapproval of the handling of Katrina played an important role in changing Tennessean's attitudes toward Bush (from approval of the job he was doing overall to disapproval), approval of Obama's response to the Haiti earthquake doesn't seem to be having an impact on Tennesseans' evaluation of his job performance overall.

### **Health reform: Most Tennesseans want a do-over**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

When asked what Congress should do next on health reform, a majority of Tennesseans, 53 percent, say Congress should start on a new bill. Twenty-two percent say Congress should pass a bill similar those the House and Senate have passed. Only sixteen percent say Congress should stop working on health reform altogether.

Among Democrats, a plurality, 49 percent, say Congress should pass something similar to what's being considered now, 48 percent say Congress should start on a new bill, and only 3 percent say Congress should stop working on health reform. Most Republicans, 61 percent, say Congress should start on a new bill, followed by 33 percent who say Congress should stop working on health reform, and only 6 percent who say that Congress should pass something similar to what it's currently considering. Of course, perceptions of what a new bill would or should entail likely differ greatly between Democrats and Republicans who prefer that course of action.

Most of Tennessee's independents, 63 percent, say Congress should start work on a new health reform bill, followed by 19 percent who say something like the current bills should be passed, and 18 percent who say Congress should just stop working on health reform.

**Iraq a mistake that's going well, Afghanistan the right choice but progress uncertain**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Consistent with responses to the last few MTSU polls, most Tennesseans, 58 percent, think the war in Iraq is going either moderately or very well, with 34 percent saying that it is going either moderately or very badly. The remaining 8 percent either don't know how things are going or refused to answer the question. Despite the generally positive attitude toward the war's progress, a plurality of Tennesseans, 49 percent, say the Iraq war was a mistake, while only 43 percent say it was not, with 9 percent saying they don't know or refusing to answer the question.

Just after the announcement of a major deployment of additional troops to Afghanistan in mid-February, Tennesseans are more ambivalent on that war's progress. A plurality, 46 percent, say the war in Afghanistan is going either moderately or very badly, and 42 percent say it is going either moderately or very well. The remaining poll respondents either don't know how things are going in Afghanistan or refuse to answer the question. But a majority of Tennesseans, 54 percent, say sending troops to Afghanistan in the first place was not a mistake, while only 37 percent say that it was, with the remainder saying they don't know or refusing to answer the question.

***Citizens United v. F.E.C:* Tennesseans just not sure in debate about corporate speech**

*(Contact Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

When asked about the recent Supreme Court decision extending free speech protection to corporate spending on advertisements endorsing or opposing particular candidates for public office during elections, Tennessee seems a little confused by the whole thing.

A plurality of 47 percent say that they either disapprove or strongly disapprove of the decision, while only 15 percent say that they approve or strongly approve. Thirty-eight percent say they aren't sure what they think or refuse to answer the question, indicating a relatively large amount of uncertainty on the issue. Although participants were randomly assigned to different conditions where the question emphasized the free speech or corporate influence aspects of the decision, or mentioned both, this framing did not have a statistically significant effect on responses.

Tennesseans are similarly ambivalent about the principles underlying the decision. Forty percent either agree or strongly agree that the First Amendment gives corporations the same speech rights as individuals, but 37 percent disagree or strongly disagree, and 24 percent aren't sure. Twenty-four percent agree or strongly agree that the First Amendment protects how money is spent the same as it does speech, while 40 percent disagree or strongly disagree with that interpretation, and 36 percent aren't sure or refuse to answer the question.

**Sample and method**

The poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 15-27, 2010, by students in the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. Students interviewed 634 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 percent 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 estimates 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:

	<b>Census Percent</b>	<b>Unadjusted Sample Percent</b>	<b>Adjusted Sample Percent</b>
<b>Age:</b>			
<b>18-34</b>	29.5	12.5	29.5
<b>35-49</b>	28.3	23.3	28.3
<b>50-64</b>	24.9	35.3	25.0
<b>65+</b>	17.3	28.8	17.2
<b>Race:</b>			
<b>White</b>	82.1	87.2	81.7
<b>Black</b>	15.5	9.0	15.7
<b>Other</b>	2.4	3.8	2.6
<b>Gender:</b>			
<b>Male</b>	48.0	48.3	47.6
<b>Female</b>	52.0	51.7	52.4

Small variations in reported percentages (1 percent or less) sometimes result from rounding variations in different statistical procedures or the way different programs handle population weights. Weights also can increase the reported sample size in frequency tables. And, in our summary, where reported percentages do not otherwise total 100 percent, small numbers of those who are undecided or refused to answer may have been omitted.