



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 3, 2010**

**CONTACTS:**  
Ken Blake (615) 210-6187  
Bob Wyatt (615) 477-8389  
Jason Reineke (615) 494-7746  
Jena Locke (615) 242-8856

### **DISAPPROVAL OF OBAMA HITS MAJORITY MARK IN TENNESSEE**

Candidates for governor virtually unknown; Tea Party membership at 9 percent

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** – A majority of Tennesseans disapprove of President Obama’s job performance for the first time since his inauguration, the latest MTSU Poll finds.

Other findings show nearly three-fourths of Tennesseans have no idea who’s running for governor; and while 29 percent approve of the Tea Party movement, which held a national convention in Nashville last month, just 9 percent consider themselves members.

Conducted by Middle Tennessee State University’s College of Mass Communication, the telephone poll of 634 Tennessee adults chosen at random from across the state has an error margin of plus or minus four percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Full results are available on the poll’s website, [www.mtsusurveygroup.org](http://www.mtsusurveygroup.org).

Fifty-one percent of Tennesseans disapprove of Obama’s job performance in the latest poll, up from 46 percent in the fall and 27 percent in spring, according to Dr. Jason Reineke, associate director of the MTSU Poll and an assistant professor of journalism at MTSU.

“Significantly, dissatisfaction with Obama has spread from Republicans to include independents,” Reineke added. “Last fall, 43 percent of independents disapproved of Obama. Today, that figure has risen to 61 percent.”

The overall 51 percent disapproval represents a slim majority at best, considering the poll’s error margin of plus or minus four percentage points. Nonetheless, the poll’s complementary findings that 42 percent approve of Obama and 7 percent are undecided indicate beyond reasonable doubt that more Tennesseans disapprove of Obama than approve of him.

Financial uncertainty appears to be driving much of the decline in Obama’s popularity among independents. Sixty-nine percent of independents who are worried about their family’s financial well-being during the year to come also disapprove of Obama compared to 49 percent of independents who have little or no financial concerns.

Dr. Bob Wyatt, MTSU professor of journalism and a co-founder of the MTSU Poll, called the results a mixed bag for Obama.

“He’s in trouble for things he can’t control, as the wisdom goes, and that’s both good news and bad news for him. He’s still doing better than his predecessor, though,” Wyatt said, alluding to former President George W. Bush, who concluded his presidency with a 32 percent approval rating and a 59 percent disapproval rating across the state.

**MORE**

Meanwhile, 73 percent of Tennessee adults can't name a single gubernatorial candidate when asked to list as many as they can recall. Nineteen percent were able to name Republican Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam, earning him dubious distinction as the least-unknown among a generally anonymous field of candidates. Behind Haslam, who has been advertising heavily on television, U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., comes to mind for 10 percent of Tennesseans. The remaining candidates are recalled by four percent or fewer of the state's adults.

Even when mentioned one at a time by name, none of the candidates is recognized by a majority of Tennesseans, and no candidate has more than 12 percent support.

"It's still very early in the race, of course," said Dr. Ken Blake, director of the MTSU Poll and associate professor of journalism at MTSU. "But these findings show just how far all of the candidates have to go in getting themselves introduced to the public."

In another area of state politics, 29 percent of Tennesseans hold a favorable view of the Tea Party movement, but just 9 percent consider themselves members of the movement.

Alongside the 29 percent who hold a favorable view of the movement, 19 percent hold an unfavorable view, 32 percent indicate they have heard of the movement but have no opinion about it, and 19 percent have never heard of the movement. The rest give no answer.

"Possibly because of the movement's heavy media coverage, state residents tend to overestimate the movement's membership," Blake said. "The average guess is that 26 percent of Tennesseans presently identify themselves as members of the movement, a figure significantly higher than the poll's finding of 9 percent."

Both membership in the movement and favorable attitudes toward it are most common among Tennesseans at the right end of the political spectrum. Both traits register significantly lower among political moderates and those on the left, although membership edges back up a bit among Tennesseans who consider themselves "far left." Looking purely at demographics, members are more likely to be male than female, and Tennesseans who approve of the movement are more likely to be white than minority and, among whites, more likely to be both religiously conservative and male.

In still other poll findings:

- Most Tennesseans think Congress should start over on health care reform.
- The majority think that the Iraq war, though initially a mistake, is now going well.
- While Obama's approval ratings are down, most think Obama is doing a good job of responding to the earthquake in Haiti.

For 11 years, the Survey Group at MTSU has been providing independent, non-partisan and unbiased public opinion data regarding major social, political, and ethical issues affecting Tennessee. The poll began in 1998 as a measure of public opinion in the 39 counties comprising Middle Tennessee and began measuring public opinion statewide in 2001. Learn more and view the full report at [www.mtsusurveygroup.org](http://www.mtsusurveygroup.org).

###

**Note:** [Click here](#) to view Spring 2010 poll results and to search past poll results.

Document files may be obtained by contacting [jena@hallstrategies.com](mailto:jena@hallstrategies.com). Economic results from the MTSU Poll will be released tomorrow.