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Tennesseans: What? There's a governor's race going on? Tennesseans haven't done much thinking yet about whom they want moving into the governor's mansion after this November's election. Asked to name as many of the current gubernatorial candidates as they can recall, nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of the state's adults can't come up with a single one. When the candidates are named one at a time, none is recognized by a majority of the state's residents, and none has more than 12 percent support. Republican Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam's television advertising appears to be paying dividends, though. He leads in visibility, coming to mind for 19 percent of Tennesseans. U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., follows, coming to mind for 10 percent of Tennesseans. *(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Tea Party has high profile, moderate favorability and low membership in the state. More Tennesseans have heard about the Tea Party movement than favor it, and more favor it than say they've joined it. Twenty-nine percent of Tennesseans hold a favorable opinion of the Tea Party movement, and 9 percent identify themselves as members. Meanwhile, 19 percent hold unfavorable views of the movement, 32 percent indicate they have heard of the movement but have no opinion about it, and 19 percent have never heard of the movement. Tennesseans tend to overestimate the proportion of state residents who belong to the movement. Also, those who support the movement and those who claim membership in it cluster at the right end of the state's political spectrum. *(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Bredesen still popular heading into final year as governor. Gov. Phil Bredesen is heading out of office with the same majority, broad-based support he has enjoyed for most of his two terms as governor. Fifty-two percent of Tennesseans say they approve of the job the governor is doing, a figure identical to where he stood last spring and down slightly, although within the poll's error margin, compared to his 56 percent approval rating in this past fall's MTSU Poll. *(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Approval of state Legislature low but holding steady. Approval of Tennessee's Legislature remains low but more or less steady, registering at 36 percent compared to 38 percent in the fall. Thirty-two percent disapprove of the Legislature, and 30 percent don't know or give no answer. Opinions about who should control the Legislature also divide roughly into thirds. Twenty-nine percent of Tennesseans want Democrats in control, while 35 percent want Republicans in control, and another 35 percent don't care who is in control. *(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Tennesseans: What? There's a governor's race going on?

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Tennesseans haven't done much thinking yet about whom they want moving into the governor's mansion after this November's election.

Asked to name as many of the current gubernatorial candidates as they can recall, nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of the state's adults can't come up with even one.

Even when the candidates are named one at a time, none is recognized by a majority of the state's residents, and none has more than 12 percent support.

A solid majority (57 percent) of Tennesseans say they currently don't care whether the new governor is a Democrat or a Republican. Only 52 percent of Democrats express a preference for a Democratic governor, the same percentage of Republicans who express a preference for a Republican governor. Independents are the most likely to express no preference (72 percent).

Republican Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam, who has been advertising heavily on television, appears to be the best known candidate. He comes to mind for 19 percent of Tennesseans. U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., follows, coming to mind for 10 percent of Tennesseans.

The remaining candidates – including state Senate Minority Leader Jim Kyle, D-Memphis, who quit the race at about the time the poll concluded – are recalled by 4 percent or fewer of the state's adults.

The 12 percent approval rating belongs to Haslam, but the difference between his approval rating and the next highest, Wamp's 10 percent, is within the poll's error margin, meaning a statistical tie between the two. The table below presents the breakdown for each of the leading candidates at the time of the poll.

Table 1:
Attitudes toward Tennessee candidates for governor, February 2010

	Gibbons	Haslam	Kyle	McMillan	McWherter	Ramsey	Wamp
Support	4%	12%	2%	3%	6%	5%	10%
Oppose	3%	5%	5%	4%	6%	6%	10%
Never heard of	64%	55%	69%	67%	53%	58%	52%
Heard of, but no opinion	26%	25%	20%	23%	31%	27%	25%
Refused	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%

Frequent newspaper readers, especially those who are well educated and male, do the best when quizzed. But even this group can name an average of just one candidate.

Perhaps because of Haslam's television advertising campaign, Tennesseans who watch television news at least four times a week are significantly more likely to be able to name Haslam than are those who watch less often.

Tea Party has high profile, moderate favorability and low membership in the state
(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

More Tennesseans have heard about the Tea Party movement than favor it, and more favor it than say they've joined it.

Twenty-nine percent of Tennesseans hold a favorable opinion of the Tea Party movement, and 9 percent identify themselves as members.

Meanwhile, 19 percent hold unfavorable views of the movement, 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.

In addition to the 19 percent of Tennesseans who have never heard of the movement, 30 percent say they've heard or read "a lot" about the movement, 33 percent respond with "some," and 16 percent answer "not much." The rest give no answer.

State residents tend to overestimate the movement's membership, guessing, on average, that 26 percent of Tennesseans presently identify themselves as members of the movement, almost three times as many as the 9 percent who self-identified in response to the MTSU poll.

Among the 91 percent of Tennesseans who do not presently identify themselves as Tea Party members, 3 percent say they are "very likely" and 11 percent "somewhat likely" to join the Tea Party movement during the next 12 months. Twenty-one percent say they are "not too likely" to join in the next 12 months, and 48 percent say they are "not at all likely" to join. The rest don't know or give no answer.

Tea Party members cluster at the right end of the state's political spectrum. Among those who describe themselves as politically "far right" and also among those call themselves "conservative," 22 percent say they are members of the movement. By contrast, among those who identify as "middle of the road" and also among those who identify as "liberal," only 1 percent say they are members. Those even further left warm back up to the movement somewhat, with 10 percent claiming membership in the movement.

The distribution of favorable opinions about the Tea Party movement follows a similar pattern. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of both "conservative" and "far right" Tennesseans approve of the movement, a figure that climbs to 84 percent among those who prefer Fox News over any other network news outlet. For comparison, a 16 percent favorability rating is the norm anywhere from "middle of the road" to the left end of the political spectrum.

The main difference evident as one moves from "middle of the road" to "far left" is a shift from a prevailing indecision about the movement among those ranging from "middle of the road" to "liberal" to a prevailing disapproval among those ranging from "liberal" to "far left."

Overall in Tennessee, about 5 percent of adults identify as "far right," 33 percent as "conservative," 40 percent as "middle of the road," 11 percent as "liberal," and 3 percent as "far left." The rest aren't sure or give no answer.

Looking purely at demographics, Tennesseans who view the movement favorably are more likely to be white than minority and, among whites, more likely to be both religiously conservative and male.

Bredesen still popular heading into final year as governor

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Gov. Phil Bredesen is heading out of office with the same majority, broad-based support he has enjoyed for most of his two terms as governor.

Fifty-two percent of Tennesseans say they approve of the job the governor is doing, a figure identical to where he stood last spring and down slightly, although within the poll's error margin, compared to his 56 percent approval rating in this past fall's MTSU Poll. Twenty percent disapprove of the governor, and the rest don't know or give no answer.

Not surprisingly, 60 percent of strong Democrats approve of the Democratic Bredesen. But so do 51 percent of moderates, whether Democratic or Republican, along with a 46 percent plurality of strong Republicans.

Approval of state Legislature low but holding steady

(Contact Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Approval of Tennessee's Legislature remains low but more or less steady, registering at 36 percent compared to 38 percent in the fall.

Thirty-two percent disapprove of the Legislature, and 30 percent don't know or give no answer. Opinions about who should control the Legislature also divide roughly into thirds. Twenty-nine percent of Tennesseans want Democrats in control, while 35 percent want Republicans in control, and another 35 percent don't care who is in control. The rest give no answer.

Partisan loyalties underlie these Legislative control attitudes, with about three-fourths of Democrats preferring Democratic control and about about three-fourths of Republicans preferring Republican control. A 46 percent plurality of independents express no preference, but 34 percent prefer Republican control, and 18 percent prefer Democratic control.

Sample and method

The poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 15-27 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 ± 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:

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