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MTSU Poll Report, Fall 2010

Tennesseans generally tolerant toward Muslims, but most oppose Park51 near “Ground Zero.” A majority of Tennesseans say they support religious rights for Muslims in America. Most also say they don’t care one way or another about the construction of Islamic community centers in Murfreesboro or “near where you live,” or say that they support construction. But a majority oppose construction of the Park51 Islamic community center and place of worship near Ground Zero in New York City. *(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Most Tennesseans do not believe that American Muslims heighten risk of terrorism. Most don’t consider the threat of terrorism increased by the presence of Muslims in America. Also, most are opposed to Muslim registration and profiling. *(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Haslam leads McWherter, draws majorities of tea partiers and Wamp, Ramsey fans. Bill Haslam leads Mike McWherter 42-19 percent, with 34 percent undecided. *(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Tennesseans like Republicans over Dems in legislative races, but many see no difference. Thirty-four percent of Tennesseans want Republicans to run Congress, while 20 percent want Democrats in charge. But 36 percent think it would be the same either way. Pessimism is even higher at the state level. *(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Bredesen closes out a popular governorship, but Legislature still not feelin’ the love. Gov. Phil Bredesen ends his administration with a 57 percent approval rating. Approval of the Legislature edges up a bit, but only to 40 percent. *(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

President Obama’s job approval continues to erode in Tennessee. Fifty-five percent disapprove, and only 35 percent approve of the job Obama is doing. Approval is down and disapproval is up from previous polls. A majority of independents disapprove, with concern about the national economy as the deciding factor. *(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Tennesseans see Washington as dysfunctional, blame both sides. Congressional Republicans are not doing enough to work with the President, say even Tennessee’s Republicans. But Tennesseans say Obama isn’t doing enough to work with Republicans, either. *(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Belief in rumors about Obama’s birth and religion persist among Tennesseans. There’s been little change since last year on this issue despite the administration’s attempts to prove the rumors unfounded. Large numbers, though not a majority, believe that the president was born in another country, and is a Muslim. Among independents education is the key factor. Among Republicans, tea party membership is the key factor. *(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)*

Tea party movement approval, membership remain low in Tennessee. Thirty percent of Tennesseans hold a favorable view of the tea party movement, while 19 percent disapprove, 38 percent are undecided, and 12 percent have never heard of it. Only 7 percent self-identify as tea party members. *(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Economic worries continue for most state residents. Despite the technical end of the recession more than a year ago, majorities of Tennesseans remain worried about the national economy, the state economy, and their own family finances. *(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)*

Popularity of health care reform depends on perception of personal impact. Those who think they'll benefit tend to support it, those who think they'll be hurt by it tend to oppose it. Among those who don't think it will have any effect on them personally, Democrats strongly support health reform while Republicans are strongly opposed. (Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Tennesseans, especially Republican ones, highly protective of gun owners' rights. A 60-percent majority of Tennesseans consider protecting the right of Americans to own guns more important than controlling gun ownership. (Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Tennesseans hold mixed views about wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Judgment of whether the war in Afghanistan was a mistake or not is primarily determined by perception of how that war is going currently. Only 50 percent say the Afghanistan war was the right decision. After the official end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq, a plurality still say that war was a mistake. (Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Detailed Findings

Tennesseans generally tolerant toward Muslims, but most oppose Park51 near "Ground Zero."

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Seventy-six percent¹ of Tennesseans "agree" or "strongly agree" that Muslims should have the same religious rights as other Americans, compared with only 14 percent who "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Only 4 percent say that they "neither agree nor disagree."

A plurality of Tennesseans, 42 percent, say that they neither support nor oppose the planned construction of an Islamic community center and place of worship near Murfreesboro. Twenty-eight percent say that they "oppose" or "strongly oppose" the center's construction. But almost an equal number, 24 percent, say that they "support" or "strongly support" the center's construction. The difference between those who support the center's construction and those who are opposed to it is within the MTSU poll's margin of error. The remaining 6 percent of poll participants say that they don't know how they feel about the center's construction, or refused to answer the question.

When presented with the prospect of a hypothetical Islamic community center and place of worship being proposed "near where you live," poll participants responded similarly. Forty-three percent said that they would "neither support nor oppose" construction, 30 percent said that they would "oppose" or "strongly oppose" construction, and 23 percent said that they would "support" or "strongly support" construction.

However, most Tennesseans, 63 percent, are either "opposed" or "strongly opposed" to the Park51 Islamic community center and place of worship near Ground Zero in New York City. Twenty percent say that they "neither support nor oppose" the center's construction. Only 15 percent support or strongly support its construction.

When asked how they felt about the proposition that communities, in general, should be able to prohibit mosques from being built, a plurality of Tennesseans, 43 percent, say that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the idea. Thirty-nine percent "agree" or "strongly agree" that communities should be able to prohibit mosques from being built. Ten percent "neither agree nor disagree."

Most Tennesseans do not believe American Muslims heighten risk of terrorism

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Fifty percent of Tennesseans either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the proposition that Muslims in the U.S. increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks, compared with only 32 percent who "agree" or "strongly agree." Eight

¹ Due to a typographical error this document originally stated that 66 percent of Tennesseans agreed or strongly agreed that Muslims should have the same religious rights as other Americans.

percent “neither agree nor disagree,” and the remaining poll respondents either said that they didn’t know or refused to answer the question².

Fifty-six percent of Tennesseans “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the idea that Muslims in the United States should be required to register their whereabouts with the government. Only 32 percent “agree” or “strongly agree” with this proposal. Six percent “neither agree nor disagree.”

An even larger majority, 66 percent of Tennesseans, “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is wrong to profile people as potential terrorists solely on the basis of being Muslim. Only 25 percent “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” Three percent “neither agree nor disagree.”

Haslam leads McWherter, draws majorities of tea partiers and Wamp, Ramsey fans

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Bill Haslam leads Mike McWherter by a comfortable margin in the race for Tennessee governor. Asked whether they would vote for Haslam, McWherter or “someone else” if the gubernatorial election were held today, 42 percent of Tennesseans chose Haslam, while 19 percent chose McWherter, and 4 percent preferred someone else. A sizable 34 percent indicated that they didn’t know whom they would vote for, and the rest declined to answer.

The 34 percent of Tennesseans who are undecided break down into two groups of roughly equal sizes: likely voters who are either younger political independents or female Democrats, and unlikely voters who identify as independents or Democrats and live in Middle Tennessee.

Haslam does slightly better among Tennesseans who say both that they are registered to vote and that they voted in the 2008 presidential election. Haslam attracts 50 percent of these voters compared to McWherter’s 21 percent. Four percent plan to vote for someone else, 24 percent are undecided, and the rest decline to answer.

The results are similar to those of a statewide Rasmussen poll conducted Oct. 7 that found 59 percent support for Haslam and 31 percent support for McWherter, with 2 percent preferring someone else and 7 percent unsure. Unlike the Rasmussen poll’s question, the MTSU Poll’s question included the phrase, “or are you not sure yet?” which invited undecided respondents to indicate their lack of a preference. This difference in question phrasing likely accounts for the greater proportion of undecided voters in the MTSU Poll compared to the Rasmussen poll.

Part of Haslam’s momentum seems to have come from his ability to attract the support of Tennesseans who voted for his opponents in the Republican primary. A little over half (56 percent) of Tennesseans who voted for either Ron Ramsey or Zach Wamp in the Republican primary have now lined up behind Haslam. Twenty-three percent of these former Ramsey or Wamp supporters say they don’t know whom they would prefer in the gubernatorial race, and the rest either prefer someone else or decline to answer.

Of those who voted for Haslam in the primary, 84 percent plan to vote for him in the general election, and single-digit proportions don’t know, favor McWherter, or someone else. McWherter’s supporters in the primary are comparably less sure of him now, with 70 percent planning to stick with him in the general but 21 percent not sure now whom they prefer.

Members and admirers of Tennessee’s tea party movement favor Haslam over McWherter by substantial proportions. Among Tennesseans who hold a favorable view of the tea party movement, 68 percent would vote for Haslam, 6 percent would vote for McWherter, 20 percent are unsure, and the rest decline to answer or would vote for someone else. Among Tennesseans who identify themselves as members of the movement, 70 percent would vote for Haslam, 10 percent for McWherter, 10 percent are undecided, and the rest prefer someone else or decline to answer. As was the case last spring, though, Tea party supporters and members remain minorities in the state, though, with 30 percent of Tennesseans saying they hold a favorable view of the movement and just 7 percent saying they belong to the movement. Thus, the tea party movement does not appear poised to shake up politics in Tennessee the way it has in some other states.

² Due to a typographical error this document originally stated that 44 percent of Tennesseans disagreed or strongly disagreed that Muslims in the U.S. increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks, that 28 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and that 7 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Tennesseans like Republicans over Dems in legislative races, but many see no difference

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Tennesseans are more likely to prefer a Republican-controlled Congress and state Legislature over a Congress and Legislature controlled by Democrats. However, sizable proportions predict things will stay the same regardless of which party ends up in control.

Thirty-four percent of Tennesseans think the country would be better off if Republicans controlled Congress. By contrast, only 20 percent of state residents think the country would be better off if Democrats controlled Congress. But 36 percent say the country would be the same no matter which party controls Congress after the November election. Nine percent don't know, and the rest decline to answer. These numbers are virtually identical to results of national polling conducted in September.

Pessimism about the effects of a change in party leadership is even greater at the state level, where a 41 percent plurality of Tennesseans think conditions in the state will be the same no matter which party controls the state Legislature. But here, too, Republicans inspire more optimism than do Democrats. Twenty-eight percent of Tennesseans think the state would fare better under a Republican-controlled Legislature, while 18 percent see a better future under a Democrat-controlled Legislature. Eleven percent don't know, and the rest decline to answer.

As one might expect, party preference is the strongest predictor of these attitudes, with, for example, 73 percent of Republicans – and especially Republican fans of Fox News –preferring a Republican-controlled Congress and about 20 percent saying party control would make no difference. By comparison, 57 percent of Democrats prefer a Democrat-controlled Congress, and 32 percent say party control would make no difference. Independents are the most likely of all to say that party control would make no difference (49 percent), but 20 percent would prefer to see Republicans in charge compared to the 14 percent who think having Democrats in charge would be better. Fox News viewing makes a difference among independents, too, with independent viewers of Fox News much more likely than independent fans of other news networks to prefer a Republican-controlled Congress.

Bredesen closes out a popular governorship, but Legislature still not feelin' the love

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen is finishing his governorship with a high approval rating characteristic of the majority of his time in office. Fifty-seven percent of Tennesseans say they approve of the job Bredesen is doing. Twenty-one percent disapprove, and 20 percent don't know. The rest give no answer.

Seventy percent of Democrats approve of Bredesen, who is a Democrat. But 54 percent of Republicans and independents approve of him as well.

The state Legislature, by contrast, has the approval of 40 percent of Tennesseans, an uptick from the spring poll's 36 percent and even the 38 percent approval observed last fall. Thirty-one percent disapprove of the state Legislature, and 27 percent don't know what to think about the Legislature.

President Obama's job approval continues to erode in Tennessee

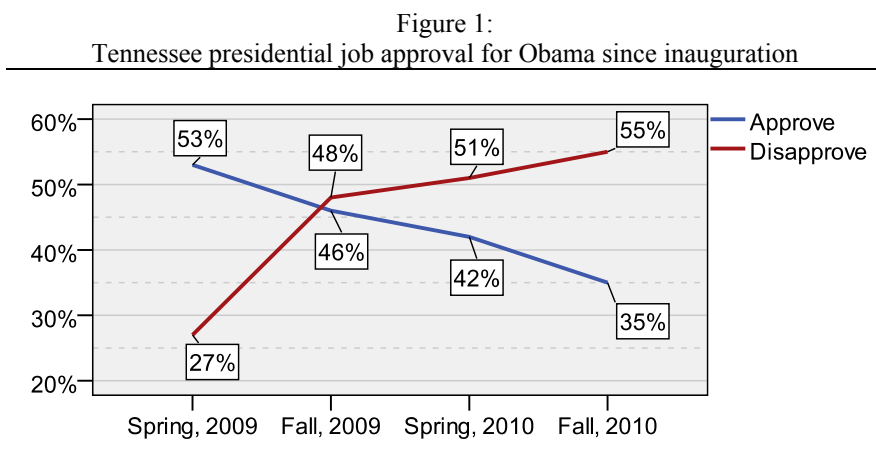
(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

More Tennesseans continue to disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as president. Fifty-five percent say that they disapprove while only 35 percent approve, changes from 51 and 42 percent who gave those responses respectively in the spring 2010 MTSU poll. The remainder of respondents either said that they didn't know how they felt about the job Obama is doing or refused to answer the question.

For comparison, as of October 13, 2010 Pollster.com estimated that nationally 50 percent of Americans disapprove of the job Obama is doing as president while 46 percent approve.

Approval breaks predictably along party lines. Seventy-four percent of Democrats say that they approve of Obama’s job performance while only 18 percent say they disapprove. Among Republicans, only 8 percent approve of the job Obama is doing as president, while 87 percent disapprove.

Obama continues to lose the battle for self-identified independents in Tennessee. Currently only 35 percent of this group approves of the job he is doing while 53 percent disapprove. These numbers appear to depend on economic concerns. Among independents who say that they are “somewhat,” “not too,” or “not at all” worried about the nation’s economy over the next few years, a plurality of 47 percent actually approve of the job Obama is doing, while only 39 percent disapprove. However, among independents who say that they are “very” worried about the nation’s economy over the next few years, approval drops to a mere 15 percent, while disapproval rockets up to 71



Source: MTSU Poll

percent. Last spring’s MTSU poll has similar results, but the determining factor among independents at that time was worry about their families’ financial futures, whereas now the focus seems to be on the future of the national economy.

Furthermore, looking ahead, Tennesseans are pessimistic when it comes to Obama being able to do much about the country’s economic conditions. Only 37 percent said that they were either “very” or “somewhat” confident that the Obama administration would be able to improve the economy, while 61 percent said that they were “not too” or “not at all” confident in the administration’s abilities in this area.

Tennesseans see Washington as dysfunctional, blame both sides

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Only 23 percent of Tennesseans say that Republicans in Congress are doing enough to cooperate with President Obama, while 61 percent say that they are not doing enough. The remaining MTSU Poll respondents either said that they didn’t know whether the Republicans were doing enough or refused to answer this question. This belief persists across all analyzed factors. For example, even 52 percent of Tennessee Republicans say that the Republicans in Congress aren’t doing enough to cooperate with the President, while only 35 percent say that they are.

President Obama did not fare quite so badly in terms of cooperation, but still only 33 percent of Tennesseans say that the Democrat is doing enough to cooperate with Republicans in Congress, while 51 percent say that he is not. Again the remainder of participants said either that they didn’t know whether he was doing enough or refused to answer the question. Seventy percent of Democrats say he’s doing enough, while 22 percent say that he’s not. Only 11 percent of Republicans say that he’s doing enough, while 80 percent say that he’s not. Independents are more closely divided, with 31 percent saying that Obama is doing enough to cooperate with Republicans in Congress, and a plurality of 47 percent saying that he’s not. Concern about the national economy is the key factor for independents; among those who say that they are “somewhat,” “not too,” or “not at all” worried about the national economy over the next few years, 41 percent say that Obama is doing enough to cooperate with Republicans, while

37 percent say that he is not. But among independents who say that they are “very worried” about the national economy over the next few years, only 13 percent say that Obama is doing enough to cooperate with Republicans, while 58 percent say that he is not.

Belief in rumors about Obama’s birth and religion persist among Tennesseans

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Only a narrow majority of Tennesseans, 52 percent, believe that President Barack Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in the United States (as is required to serve as president). Fully 37 percent of MTSU Poll participants say that it is “probably” or “definitely” the case that the president was born in another country. Eleven percent said they didn’t know whether Obama was born in another country. This result is similar to percentages calculated in fall 2009, the last time the MTSU poll asked about where Obama was born. At that time, 50 percent of respondents said Obama was born in the United States, 34 percent said another country, and 15 percent said they didn’t know. The White House and officials in Hawaii, where Obama’s birth certificate is on file, have repeatedly attempted to dispel the rumor that Obama was born outside the United States.

Tennessee’s Republicans are almost equally divided on where Obama was born, with 45 percent saying that he was “probably” or “definitely” born in the United States, and 43 percent saying that he was “probably” or “definitely” born somewhere else. Twelve percent of Republicans say that they don’t know where Obama was born. The main factor contributing to these beliefs for Republicans appears to be membership in the tea party movement. Among Republicans who say that they are not part of the movement, 50 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in the United States, while only 27 percent say that he was “probably” or “definitely” born elsewhere, and 12 percent say that they don’t know. But among Republicans who say that they do consider themselves members of the tea party movement, a remarkable 59 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in another country, and another 13 percent say that they don’t know where Obama was born, while only 27 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in the United States.

Belief that Obama was born American is not quite as weak among Tennessee independents, but still less than half of this group, 49 percent, say that he was “definitely” or “probably” born in the United States. Forty-one percent of independents say that Obama was “definitely” or “probably” born in another country. Ten percent say that they don’t know where Obama was born. The main factor contributing to these beliefs for independents seems to be formal education, with those who have more education being less likely to believe that Obama was born in another country. For example, among independents with only a high school education or less, fully 54 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in another country. But among independents with a bachelor’s degree or more education, 64 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in the United States.

Among self-identified Democrats in Tennessee, 66 percent say that the President was “definitely” or “probably” born in the United States. Only 24 percent say that Obama was “probably” or “definitely” born in another country. Nine percent said that they don’t know where Obama was born. No other factors seem to distinguish beliefs about this matter between Democrats.

When asked about the president’s religion, 34 percent of Tennesseans say that Obama is either “probably” or “definitely” a Muslim, while 51 percent say that he “probably” or “definitely” isn’t. Fifteen percent say they don’t know whether the president is a Muslim. Again, these results are similar to those of last fall’s MTSU poll, when 30 percent said Obama was a Muslim, 55 percent said that he wasn’t, and 14 percent said that they didn’t know. Obama and others in his administration have repeatedly stated that he is a Christian.

Among Democrats in Tennessee, 77 percent say Obama is “probably” or “definitely” not a Muslim, while only 12 percent say he “probably” or “definitely” is a Muslim, and 11 percent say they don’t know. Among Republicans in Tennessee, 50 percent say that Obama “probably” or “definitely” is a Muslim, along with 16 percent who don’t know, as compared to only 34 percent who say that Obama “probably” or “definitely” isn’t a Muslim. No additional factors seem to differentiate Democrats or Republicans within their respective parties on the matter of Obama’s religion.

Thirty-seven percent of independents in Tennessee say that Obama is “probably” or “definitely” a Muslim, with 15 percent who say that they don’t know, and 48 percent who say that Obama “probably” or “definitely” isn’t a

Muslim. As with the president's place of birth, education seems to be the most important factor in whether independents think he is a Muslim or not. For example, independents with less than a bachelor's degree are nearly evenly divided on the matter, with 42 percent saying Obama "probably" or "definitely" is a Muslim, and 38 percent saying he "probably" or "definitely" isn't. However, among independents with a bachelors degree or more, only 26 percent say Obama "probably" or "definitely" is a Muslim, while 68 percent say that he "probably or "definitely" isn't.

Tea party movement approval, membership remain low in Tennessee despite high exposure

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

The tea party movement's approval and membership both remain low in Tennessee, even though nearly two in three Tennesseans say they've heard or read either "a lot" or "some" about the movement.

Thirty percent of Tennessee adults say they hold a favorable view of the movement. Nineteen percent hold an unfavorable view, and 38 percent are either undecided or haven't heard enough about the movement. Another 12 percent have heard nothing at all about the movement, and the rest decline to answer. Meanwhile, only about 7 percent of Tennesseans describe themselves as members of the movement.

These figures are virtually unchanged from last spring's MTSU Poll, when approval of the tea party movement stood at 29 percent in Tennessee, and membership, at 9 percent. Tennesseans also continue to overestimate tea party membership, guessing, on average, that 28 percent of the state's residents belong to the movement. The movement's high profile in media coverage may be distorting Tennesseans' perceptions of the movement's numbers. Or Tennesseans may be interpreting approval of the movement as membership in the movement.

Fifty-six percent of Tennessee Republicans approve of the movement compared to well under half of independents (30 percent approve) and Democrats (11 percent approve). Similarly, 55 percent of Tennesseans who call themselves "conservative" or "far right" approve of the movement compared to about 20 percent of those in the political middle and 10 percent of those on the political left. Tea party admirers and critics certainly have different media habits, too. A majority of Fox News viewers (62 percent) hold a favorable opinion of the movement, while majorities of CNN and MSNBC viewers (51 percent each) hold unfavorable opinions of the movement. Viewers of NBC, CBS and ABC are more mixed, with a 38 percent plurality saying they haven't heard enough about the movement to decide.

Demographically, tea party supporters are more likely to be over 45 years old than younger, more likely to be white than minority, more likely to be college-educated than not, more likely to earn over \$25,000 a year than to earn less, and more likely to be male than female.

Economic worries continue for most state residents

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

Despite the technical end of the recession more than a year ago, majorities of Tennesseans remain worried about the national economy, the state economy, and their own family finances.

Eighty percent of state residents say they are either very worried (38 percent) or somewhat worried (42 percent) about the direction of the nation's economy over the next few years. About as many (84 percent) rate the state's economy as either only fair (54 percent) or poor (30 percent). Fewer, but still a 62 percent majority, say they are either very worried (20 percent) or somewhat worried (42 percent) about their own family's financial situation. Seventy-three percent say the recession has hurt them. And of those, about half say the recession has hurt them "a great deal."

The economy also is the item mentioned most often when Tennesseans are asked, in an open-ended fashion, to name the most important problem facing the state (48 percent say the economy) and the most important problem facing the nation (54 percent say the economy). Half of state residents say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in Tennessee right now, and 74 percent say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the nation right now. Most of these percentages have either stayed about the same or become slightly more negative since our spring 2010 poll.

Worry about the national economy tends to break along political lines, with Republicans and independents expressing more worry than Democrats. Worry about one's family finances, though, appears more directly a function of income, with poorer Tennesseans expressing more worry than wealthier ones. Even among higher-income Tennesseans, though, majorities in most income categories still express at least some worry over family finances.

Popularity of health care reform depends on perception of personal impact

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

A plurality of Tennesseans, 48 percent, disapprove of the federal health reform law (the Affordable Care Act) passed in March and want to see the law repealed. Twenty-eight percent approve of the law and think it should stand. Six percent disapprove, but think it should stand, and 3 percent disapprove but don't know what should be done about it. The remainder of MTSU poll respondents refused to answer one or both parts of the question.

Support for the law depends mainly on the effect one thinks it is likely to have on her or him personally. Fifteen percent of respondents think that law "mostly helps" them personally, and among this group 72 percent approve of the law and think it should stand, while only 12 percent disapprove and think it should be repealed, and 4 percent disapprove but think it should stand anyway. Thirty-seven percent of Tennesseans think that the law "mostly hurts" them personally, and among this group 84 percent disapprove of the law and think it should be repealed, 4 percent disapprove of the law but think it should stand anyway, and 3 percent approve and think it should stand.

The most interesting group may be the 36 percent of poll respondents who think that the law has "no impact" on them personally one way or another. Overall, a plurality, 42 percent of these individuals approve of the law and think that it should stand, while on 29 percent of them disapprove and think it should be repealed, followed by 10 percent who disapprove but think that it should stand anyway. However, there is a major partisan divide among these "no impact" individuals. A broad majority of the Republicans who think that the law is likely to have "no impact" on them personally, 73 percent, say that they disapprove of the law and think that it should be repealed. An even broader majority of Democrats who say the law is likely to have "no impact" on them personally, 77 percent, approve of the law and think that it should stand. Among independents who perceive no likely impact of the law on them personally, 41 percent disapprove of the law and think that it should be repealed, but almost as many, 37 percent, approve of the law and think that it should stand, and 13 percent disapprove but think that it should stand.

Tennesseans, especially Republican ones, highly protective of gun rights

(Contact: Ken Blake, 615.210.6187)

A 60-percent majority of Tennesseans consider protecting the right of Americans to own guns more important than controlling gun ownership.

Among Republicans, the figure climbs to an 81-percent majority considering gun rights more important. Significantly fewer independents (53 percent) and Democrats (40 percent) see gun rights as more important. Aside from political party, race is the best predictor here, with 66 percent of whites favoring protection of gun ownership rights and only 24 percent of minorities feeling the same way.

Support in Tennessee for protecting the right to own guns is well ahead of the national level but in line with the national trend. Polling by the Pew Research Center in March found that 46 percent of all Americans considered protecting gun ownership more important than controlling it. But the figure has been on the rise since the spring of 2000, when it stood at just 29 percent.

Interestingly, Tennesseans divide more evenly when asked whether the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are right now. Forty-eight percent favor making the laws more strict, while another 48 percent favor either keeping the laws as they are now (39 percent) or making them less strict (9 percent).

Thus, there are some Tennesseans – about 20 percent, in fact – who favor both protecting the right of Americans to own guns and making laws governing the sale of firearms more strict. One possible explanation is that such individuals support gun ownership chiefly by individuals who can be trusted to use guns lawfully and responsibly. They tend to be younger Republicans and also to live outside of the state's major metropolitan areas.

Tennesseans hold mixed views about wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

(Contact: Jason Reineke, 615.494.7746)

Barely a majority, 50 percent even, of Tennesseans think that the war in Afghanistan was the right decision, but those individuals still outnumber the 39 percent who say that the war is a mistake. Attitudes about the war in Afghanistan are predictably determined by perception of how that war is going. Only 2 percent of poll respondents think that the war in Afghanistan is going “very well,” but among these individuals 80 percent say that the war was the right decision and among the 30 percent of poll respondents overall who say the war is going “moderately well” 75 percent say the war was the right decision. A plurality, but not a majority, of the 34 percent of all respondents who say that the war is going “moderately badly” still think the war was the right decision (48 percent as opposed to 40 percent who say it was a mistake). But among the 25 percent of MTSU poll participants who say the war is going “very badly” 70 percent say that the war was a mistake.

In response to the first MTSU poll after the official end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq, more Tennesseans, 49 percent, say that war was a mistake than that it was the right decision, 41 percent. The remaining poll respondents said that they didn’t know if it was the right decision or a mistake, or refused to answer the question. Partisan affiliation is the main predictor of this judgment. Seventy-five percent of Democrats say the Iraq war was a mistake, while only 16 percent say it was the right decision. Fifty-seven percent of independents say it was a mistake, while 35 percent say it was the right decision. However, a majority of Republicans, 70 percent, say that the Iraq war was the right decision, while only 21 percent say that it was a mistake.

Sample and method

The poll was conducted by telephone Sept. 27-Oct. 9, 2010 by students in the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. Students interviewed 614 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	29.9	16.7	29.6
35-49	27.7	24.5	27.9
50-64	25.0	31.7	25.2
65+	17.5	27.0	17.3
Race:			
White	81.9	85.1	81.5
Black	15.6	9.6	15.7
Other	2.5	5.3	2.8
Gender:			
Male	48.0	44.3	48.0
Female	52.0	55.7	52.0

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.