



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 14, 2010

**CONTACTS:**

Ken Blake, Ph.D., MTSU Poll Director (615) 210-6187  
Jason Reineke, Ph.D., MTSU Poll Associate Director (615) 494-7746  
Abby Trotter, Publicity (615) 242-8856  
Jena Locke, Publicity (615) 337-1596

**TENNESSEANS GENERALLY TOLERANT TOWARD U.S. MUSLIMS**

Haslam leads McWherter in governor's race as November looks grim for Dems

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** – Tennesseans generally want U.S. Muslims to have the same rights as other Americans, and while most state residents oppose building an Islamic facility near "Ground Zero" in New York, most wouldn't mind construction of such facilities in Murfreesboro or even closer to home, the latest MTSU Poll shows.

Seventy-six percent<sup>1</sup> of Tennesseans say U.S. Muslims deserve the same rights as other Americans. About the same proportion say they either support or would not oppose construction of an Islamic facility in Murfreesboro or near where they live.

"Recent news coverage has tended to portray Tennessee as intensely hostile toward Muslim Americans," said Dr. Jason Reineke, associate director of the MTSU Poll. "Our findings suggest, though, that such attitudes are not typical of state residents – or at least not typically expressed by them, even when participating anonymously in a survey."

Most Tennesseans also reject the idea that Muslims in the U.S. should have to register their whereabouts with the government, and most consider it wrong to profile people as potential terrorists because they are Muslim, the poll shows.

Sixty-three percent of Tennesseans do, however, oppose construction of the Park51 Community Center, the Islamic facility proposed for construction in Lower Manhattan near the World Trade Center site. The proportion is similar to the 67 percent of New York state likely voters who said in a September poll that the center should be built elsewhere.

Other findings show Republican Bill Haslam running well ahead of Democrat Mike McWherter in Tennessee's gubernatorial race. Haslam draws 42 percent support to McWherter's 19 percent among all Tennessee adults, with 34 percent undecided. Among Tennesseans who say they both voted in the 2008 presidential election and are eligible to vote in the upcoming election, Haslam attracts 50 percent, and McWherter, 21 percent, with 24 percent undecided.

"Supporters of Haslam's chief rivals in the Republican primary, Ron Ramsey and Zach Wamp, have generally lined up behind Haslam," said Dr. Ken Blake, director of the MTSU Poll. "The tea party vote seems to be favoring Haslam as well, but tea party admirers make up only about 30 percent of the state's population, and tea party members are an even smaller 7 percent."

Conducted by Middle Tennessee State University's College of Mass Communication, the telephone poll of 614 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).

**MORE**

---

<sup>1</sup> Due to a typographical error this document originally stated that 66 percent of Tennesseans say U.S. Muslims deserve the same rights as other Americans.

The poll also found continued erosion of President Barack Obama's popularity in the state. Fifty-five percent disapprove, and only 35 percent approve, of the job Obama is doing. Approval is down and disapproval is up compared to previous MTSU Polls. Significantly for Obama, a majority of independents disapprove, with concern about the national economy as the deciding factor.

The poll did not estimate the standing of specific candidates in the state's various Congressional races, but Tennesseans are more likely to say that the country would be better off with Republicans controlling Congress (34 percent) than with Democrats controlling Congress (20 percent). A sizable 36 percent, though, think that conditions will be the same regardless of which party ends up controlling Congress. The same attitudes show up when Tennesseans are asked about which party they'd like to see controlling the state Legislature.

Tennesseans say, too, that Congressional Republicans and Obama are both to blame for gridlock on Capitol Hill. Meanwhile, 37 percent continue to believe that Obama was born in another country, and 34 percent think he is a Muslim. 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. And Obama as well as others in his administration have said that he is a Christian.

Financial worries continue to dog Tennesseans, with majorities concerned about the national economy (80 percent), the state economy (84 percent), and their own family finances (62 percent). Seventy-three percent say the recession has hurt them. And of those, about half say the recession has hurt them "a great deal."

In still other poll findings:

- A 48-percent plurality of Tennesseans disapprove of the federal health reform law passed in March and want to see the law repealed.
- A 60-percent majority of Tennesseans consider protecting the right of Americans to own guns more important than controlling gun ownership.
- Half of Tennesseans think going to war in Afghanistan was the right decision, but only 41 percent consider going to war in Iraq the right decision.

For over a decade, 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 Fall 2010 poll results and to search past poll results.

Document files may be obtained by contacting [abby@hallstrategies.com](mailto:abby@hallstrategies.com).