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**TENNESSEE CRITICAL OF TEACHER TENURE, DIVIDED ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**  
Obama would lose to a Republican opponent, but his low approval rating has stabilized

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** – Tennesseans take a dim view of teacher tenure but show no consensus on whether to do away with collective bargaining power for teacher unions, the latest MTSU Poll finds.

Fifty-four percent of state residents choose the statement, "Tenure makes it hard to get rid of bad teachers" as most representative of their viewpoint, while 29 percent choose the alternative statement, "Tenure protects good teachers from being fired without just cause" as most indicative of what they think. Sixteen percent say they don't know, and the rest decline to answer.

Meanwhile, 37 percent of Tennesseans favor "eliminating the ability of teacher unions in Tennessee to negotiate with local boards of education about teacher salaries, benefits and other employment issues." But a statistically equivalent 41 percent oppose such a move, and a substantial 22 percent are undecided.

"Compared to public opinion about teacher tenure, public opinion about collective bargaining for teacher unions seem to be still taking shape in Tennessee," said Dr. Ken Blake, director of the MTSU Poll. "The people most likely to have any opinion at all on the collective bargaining issue are also, based on other measures in the poll, the ones most likely to be politically active and politically knowledgeable. They probably are creating a framework for the debate and soon will start contending with each other for the support of those who are undecided."

Conducted Feb. 14 – 26, 2011 by Middle Tennessee State University's College of Mass Communication, the telephone poll of 589 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).

The poll also finds President Obama currently trailing whoever the Republican 2012 presidential nominee might be. Thirty-one percent of Tennesseans say they would vote for Obama if the election were held today, but a 48 percent plurality say they would vote instead for "his Republican opponent." 14 percent say that they don't know who they would vote for at this time, and 6 percent volunteer that they would vote for neither candidate.

The downward slide in Obama's approval rating among Tennesseans seems to have leveled off, though, according to Dr. Jason Reineke, associate director of the MTSU Poll.

"The president's approval rating stands at 39 percent in Tennessee, a possible uptick from his 35 percent approval rating in our Fall 2010 poll," Reineke said. "But, of course, he's still down quite a bit compared to his 53 percent approval rating in the Spring 2009 MTSU Poll."

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In other findings, three in four Tennesseans considers illegal immigration a “somewhat” or “very” serious problem, and a 42 percent plurality describe as “about right” the new Arizona immigration law’s requirement that police making a stop, detention, or arrest must attempt to determine the person’s immigration status if police suspect the person is not lawfully present in the country. Another 25 percent say such a law “doesn’t go far enough,” and 28 percent say it “goes too far.”

Additionally, 55 percent characterize as “about right” the Arizona law’s requirement that people produce documents proving their immigration status if asked by police. Twenty-three percent say that aspect of the law doesn’t go far enough, and 17 percent say it goes too far.

Meanwhile, closing the Tennessee’s projected budget gap could prove politically difficult for state lawmakers.

A 52-percent majority of state residents think dealing with the budget gap will require either cutting important services (16 percent), raising state taxes (6 percent) or both (30 percent). Despite these attitudes, though, Tennesseans show little support for cuts to any of five of the state’s largest general fund budget categories. Only 25 percent of state residents favor cuts to TennCare, 14 percent favor cuts to K-12 education, 24 percent favor cuts to higher education, and 17 percent favor cuts to children’s services. Cuts to a fifth major budget category, prisons and correctional facilities, drew the most support (44 percent), but the figure is still well below a majority.

Asked about gun regulation, Tennesseans divide essentially evenly on whether laws governing the sale of guns should be kept at their current levels (43 percent) or made more strict (41 percent). Similarly, 45 percent of Tennesseans say they would support a nationwide law banning the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips, defined in the poll question as those that hold more than 10 bullets. But a statistically equivalent 42 percent say they would oppose such a law.

In still other poll findings:

- Sixty-nine percent of Tennesseans favor letting food stores sell wine.
- A 50 percent plurality think Congress should repeal the health care law.
- Support remains high for the religious rights of Muslims.
- Tennesseans think neither President Obama nor Congressional Republicans are doing enough to cooperate with each other.
- More Tennesseans approve than disapprove of new governor, legislature, but many are undecided.

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).

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**Note:** [Click here](#) to view Spring 2011 poll results and to search past poll results.

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