

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 29, 2012



CONTACTS:

Ken Blake, Ph.D., MTSU Poll Director (615) 210-6187

Jason Reineke, Ph.D., MTSU Poll Associate Director (615) 494-7746

Jena Locke, Publicity (615) 242-8856 office, (615) 337-1596 cell

SANTORUM LEADS ROMNEY AMONG TENNESSEE REPUBLICANS

- Santorum and Romney beat Obama statewide, but president's approval rating is rebounding
- Majority of Tennesseans think new voter ID law is a good thing that should be kept in place
- Lack of conviction that new teacher evaluation system improves education

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Rick Santorum leads Mitt Romney among Tennessee Republicans heading into Super Tuesday's primary, and both men appear to hold an edge over President Barack Obama among Tennesseans at large despite the president's rebounding approval rating, the latest MTSU Poll results show.

Forty percent of Tennessee Republicans in the poll favor Santorum compared to 19 percent who prefer Romney. Another 13 percent support Newt Gingrich, and 11 percent back Ron Paul.

"Tennessee appears to be heading into Santorum's Super Tuesday column," said Dr. Jason Reineke, an assistant professor in the college's School of Journalism and the MTSU Poll's associate director. "Election watchers would be wise to remember, though, just how many factors polling cannot measure or foresee, especially in the context of a primary election."

Additionally, the poll found that support is practically nonexistent for repealing a new state law that requires voters to present a photo ID when voting with 82 percent of state residents considering the new law "a good idea that should be kept in place." Only 11 percent consider the law "a bad idea that should be done away with," and the rest aren't sure.

"These percentages could reverse overnight if the Election Day problems that opponents of the law are predicting materialize," Dr. Ken Blake, MTSU associate professor of journalism and director of the MTSU Poll, said. "But with so many Tennesseans expressing support and so few undecided, these attitudes appear unlikely to change unless there's a pretty compelling turn of events or shift in the debate's frame."

Eighty-three percent of Tennesseans say they are aware of the voter ID law, a significant increase from 71 percent in the fall MTSU Poll. However, Tennesseans remain confused about some aspects of the law. While sizable majorities correctly answer that acceptable forms of ID include a current Tennessee driver's license (93 percent) and a valid U.S. military ID (81 percent), only 21 percent know that an expired Tennessee driver's license is also acceptable. Meanwhile, less than a majority (46 percent) know that "a valid employee ID issued by a major automaker to a worker at one of its Tennessee plants" would be unacceptable, and only 29 percent know that a valid University of Tennessee student identification card would be unacceptable.

Knowledge about the acceptability of an expired driver's license and of a U.S. military ID has risen since last fall's MTSU Poll. Overall knowledge of the law's particulars has remained flat, though, with Tennesseans correctly answering an average of 2.7 of the five questions about which IDs are accepted.

MORE

In other poll findings:

- Less than a fifth (18 percent) of Tennesseans think the state's new public school teacher evaluation system is increasing the quality of education. Nineteen percent think it's making no difference, and 16 percent think it's decreasing the quality. Those in the largest group say they simply don't know (48 percent).
- On another education issue, half of poll respondents think current average class sizes in Tennessee are about right, while 38 percent think public school classrooms in Tennessee should have fewer students on average. Only about four percent think the state's public school classrooms should have more students on average, and the rest aren't sure.
- With the arrival of Tennessee's spring tornado season, only about 30 percent of state residents live in a household equipped with "a special National Weather Service radio that is programmed to sound an alarm when the National Weather Service issues a tornado warning" for their county. Fifty-two percent say there is some other device in or near their home - like a cell phone or a tornado siren - that would automatically sound an alert if a tornado warning were issued for their county. A third have no alert system, and about one in four Tennesseans say they usually know about severe weather no more than a few minutes before it arrives.
- Tennesseans show little support for the Tea Party movement and even less for the Occupy Wall Street movement. About a quarter of Tennesseans (24 percent) say their opinion of the Tea Party movement is "favorable," and nearly as many (22 percent) say their view of the Tea Party movement is "not favorable." Another 22 percent say they are "undecided," and a 32 percent plurality say they haven't heard enough about the movement yet to make up their minds. By contrast, fewer – 13 percent – say they have a favorable opinion of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and 36 percent say their opinion of the movement is "not favorable." Another quarter (24 percent) are "undecided," and 27 percent haven't heard enough to make up their minds.

Conducted Feb. 13-25 by the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University, the scientifically valid telephone poll of 646 randomly selected Tennessee adults has an error margin of plus or minus four percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence.

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.

###

Note: [Click here](#) to view the full Spring 2012 poll results and to search past poll results.

Document files may be obtained by contacting jena@hallstrategies.com.