



THE TENNESSEE POLL

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TENNESSEANS SEE COVID-19 AND THE ECONOMY AS MAJOR CONCERNS FOR THE STATE AND ARE POTENTIALLY DELAYING NEEDED MEDICAL CARE THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC

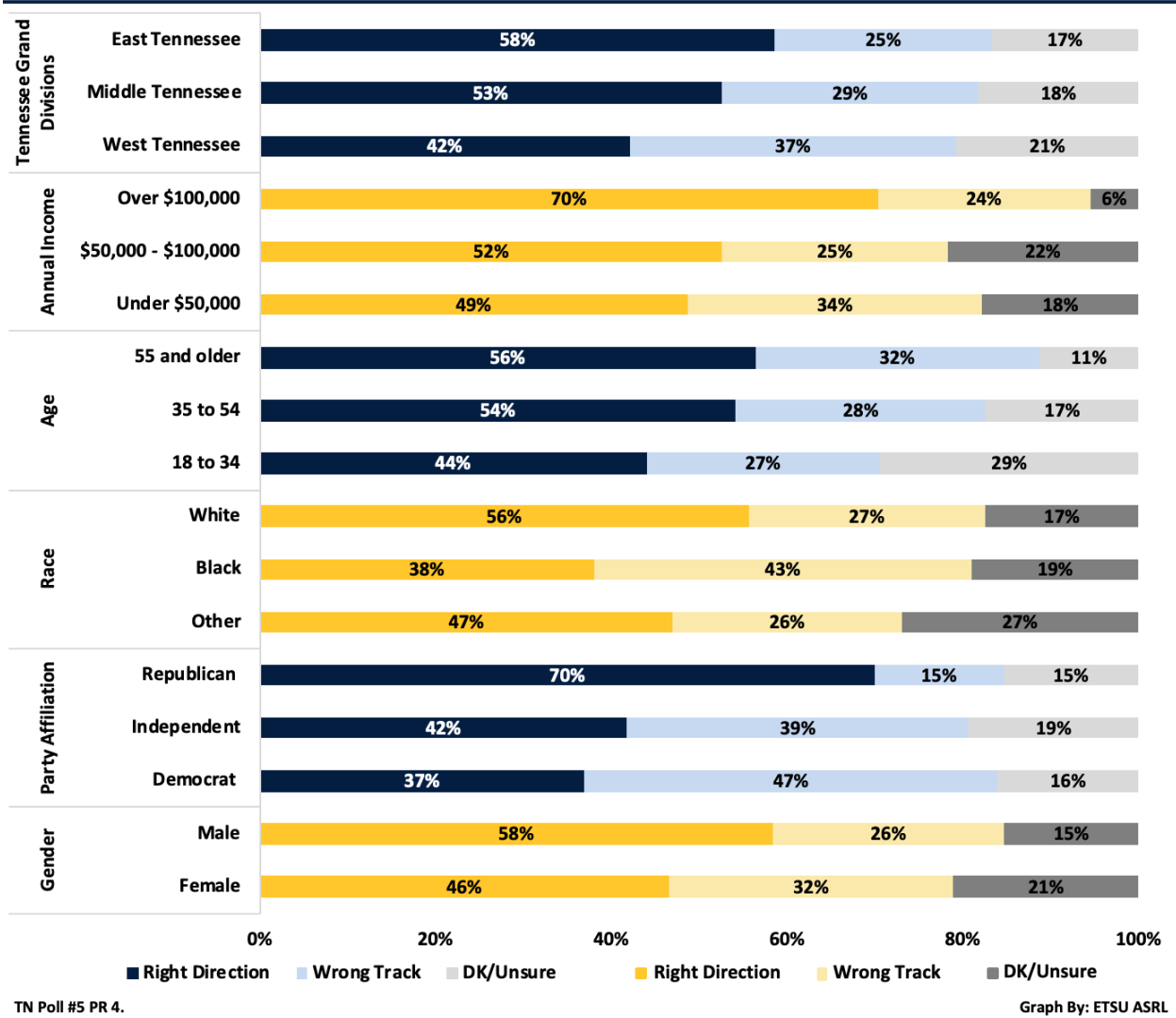
JOHNSON CITY (May 28, 2020) – The most recent Tennessee Poll by East Tennessee State University finds that although Tennesseans feel that the COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest problem facing both the nation and the state, they also believe things are generally going in the right direction for the Volunteer State.

The poll, fielded from April 22-May 1 by the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) at ETSU, surveyed a random representative sample of Tennesseans across the state. The poll first asked residents what they felt was the biggest problem facing the United States today and then followed by asking what the biggest problem facing the state of Tennessee was. Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned item was COVID-19 for both the United States (48%) and the state of Tennessee (35%). Interestingly, the top two concerns are the same for both the country and the state – COVID-19 and the economy – but the distributions are different. Tennesseans are more likely to mention COVID-19 as a concern for the United States than they are for Tennessee (13% point difference) and are more likely to mention the economy and job loss as a concern for the state than they are the country (16% point difference). This seems to indicate that while Tennesseans certainly agree on the relative concern over COVID-19, it is seen as more of an issue for the country than the state, whereas the state and local economy is a more salient issue for many Tennesseans.

Despite concerns over the coronavirus pandemic and the economic ramifications, a slim majority of Tennesseans (52%) feel that things in Tennessee are going in the right direction, but nearly a third (29%) feel that the state is off on the wrong track and another 18% are uncertain

(see Figure 1). Republicans are significantly more likely to feel things are going in the right direction than are Independents or Democrats (70% versus 42% and 37%, respectively) and men are more likely to report things going in the right direction than are women (58% compared to 46%). Regional differences are noticeable with perception of state direction – East Tennesseans are more likely to feel things are going well (58%) than are those in West or Middle Tennessee (53% and 42%, respectively).

Figure 1. Perception of Direction by Demographics



Approval Ratings

Tennesseans express high levels of approval for government officials’ and agencies’ handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. ASRL asked Tennesseans their thoughts on how eight government

For more information about this study or about the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) at East Tennessee State University, please visit us on the web at www.etsu.edu/asrl. You may also contact the director of ASRL, Dr. Kelly N. Foster, at fosterkn@etsu.edu or by phone 423-439-4374

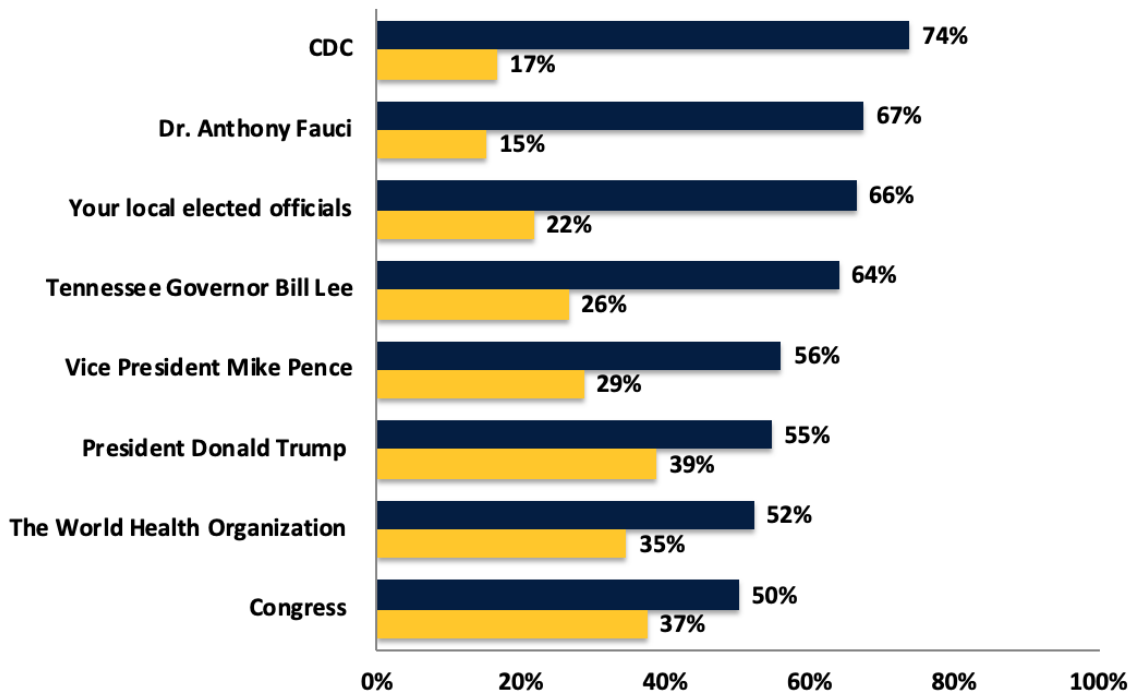
agencies or officials have done handling the coronavirus pandemic. The highest approval¹ rating of any individual or institution asked about on the recent poll came for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Nearly three-quarters of Tennesseans either strongly approve or approve of the CDC's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (19% and 55%, respectively). Rounding out the top half and following close behind the CDC in approval rating was coronavirus task force member Dr. Anthony Fauci (68% overall approval), Tennesseans' local officials (67%), and Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, who also received high approval ratings among Tennesseans (64% approval). The bottom half of those ASRL asked about, though still receiving overall approval rates from a majority of Tennesseans, were Vice President Mike Pence (56%), President Donald Trump (55%), the World Health Organization (52%), and Congress (50%). It is interesting to note that in Tennessee, President Trump is receiving slightly higher approval ratings than other national polls which indicate, during the same time period, his coronavirus approval rating is generally below 50%².

Not surprisingly, party identification seems to be a significant factor in approval ratings among various government officials and organizations. For example, only 38% of Republicans approve of the World Health Organization while 63% of Democrats and 68% of Independents do so. As expected, there are similar disparities in levels of approval for President Trump and Vice President Pence according to party identification. Though approval rates vary significantly by party identification, in anticipated patterns, it also varies by grand division within the state (see Figure 2). For example, 63% of East Tennesseans approve of President Trump's handling of COVID-19 while only 50% of Middle Tennesseans or West Tennesseans do. There are significant racial differences as well – black Tennesseans are much less likely to say they approve of the president's handling of the pandemic than are their white counterparts (26% and 62%, respectively).

¹ Approval numbers presented combine those who say they “strongly approve” or “approve”.

² <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/americans-are-largely-unimpressed-with-trumps-handling-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Figure 2. Approval Ratings for Handling COVID-19 Pandemic



TN Poll #5 PR 4.

■ Approve ■ Disapprove

Graph By: ETSU ASRL

Note: Unsure/undecided responses not included.

Gov. Lee’s approval ratings have the opposite geographic pattern to President Trump’s; however, Gov. Lee’s approval is higher in the Western part of the state (69%) than it is in the Middle (65%) or Eastern (59%) divisions. Despite this pattern, Gov. Lee seems to have generally high levels of approval among Tennesseans, which is largely consistent across gender, race, age, or income. Gov. Lee also seems to be able to navigate the partisan divide successfully in this area – a majority of Democrats (50%) say they approve of Gov. Lee’s handling of the pandemic compared to only 17% approval for the President and 25% approval for Vice President Mike Pence.

Tennesseans’ Personal Concerns

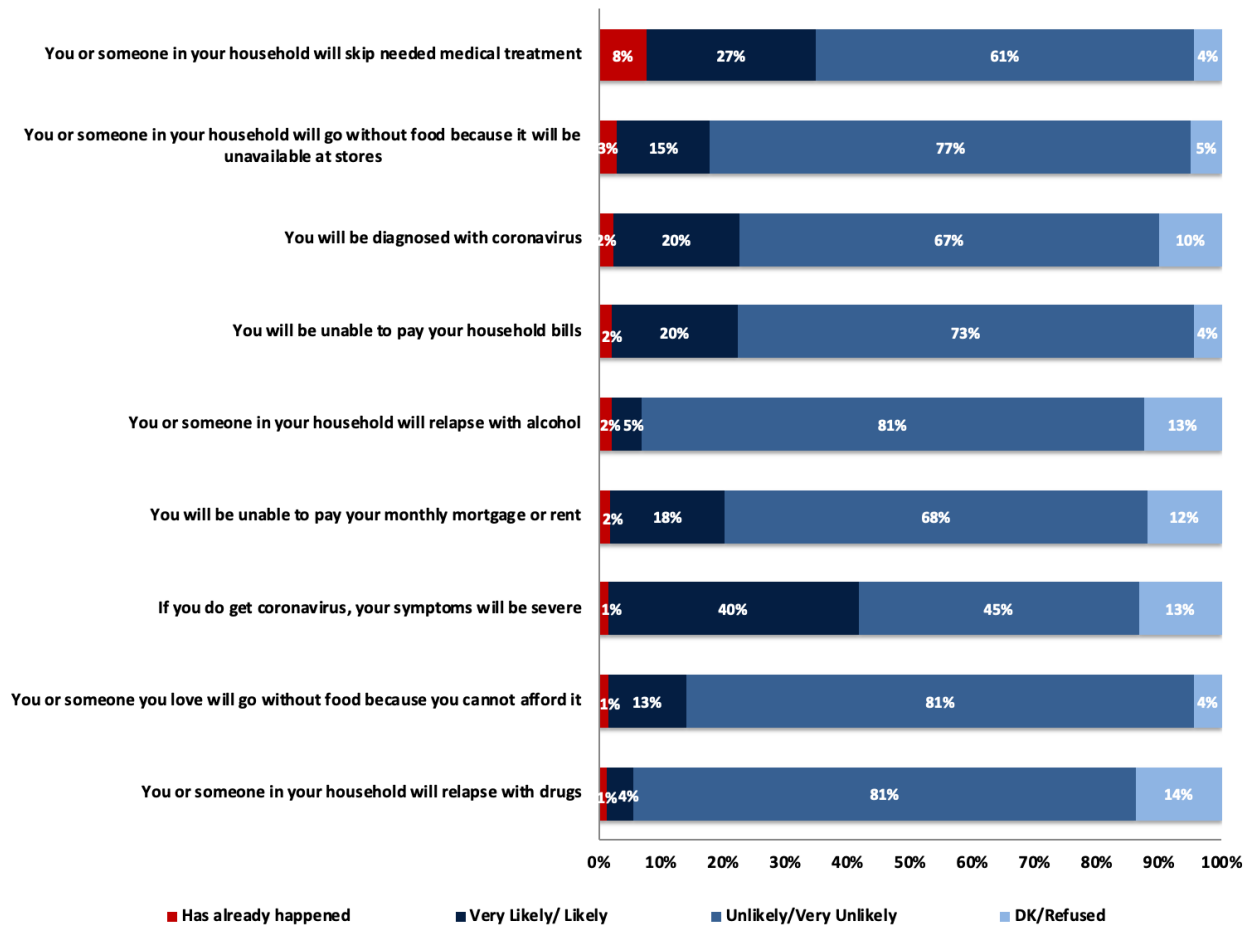
ASRL asked Tennesseans a series of questions intended to gauge if certain events had occurred and, if not, how likely respondents thought these events were to happen in the next three months. These questions centered around health and the impact on quality of life related to the coronavirus pandemic. The poll asked about getting coronavirus, concern over seriousness of symptoms, delayed medical care, food insecurity, financial insecurity, and drug and alcohol relapse (see Figure 3). The findings were surprising. Tennesseans have relatively little concern over drug or alcohol relapse or even food and financial insecurity. One of the more concerning findings related to fears of COVID-19 and the unintended consequences of the virus is the fear that individuals have of contracting it and what it means for their behaviors. The American

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College of Emergency Physicians finds that between fears of contracting COVID-19 in the emergency room and concerns about overstressing the health care system, nearly 1/3 of Americans are not getting the medical care they need³. The Tennessee Poll had similar findings – 20% report being concerned that they will contract the coronavirus in the future (with another 2% saying they have already had it) and 40% are worried that symptoms will be severe should they get COVID-19. At the time of polling, 8% of respondents reported that they had already delayed needed medical care and 27% indicated that it was very likely or likely they would in the next three months (9% and 18%, respectively). Taken as a whole, that is over 1/3 of respondents reporting that they have or will likely forego needed medical care during the pandemic. It is outside the scope of this poll to be able to determine if the potential delay in needed medical care is due to fear over COVID-19 or financial hardships from COVID-19 and the economic fallout, but regardless of the reason, the long-lasting health implications for Tennesseans who delay needed medical care have the potential to be profound.

³ <https://www.emergencyphysicians.org/globalassets/emphysicians/all-pdfs/acep-mc-covid19-april-poll-analysis.pdf>

Figure 3. Percent of Tennesseans and Likelihood of Various Outcomes in the Next 3 Months



TN Poll #5 PR 4.

Graph By: ETSU ASRL

This is one in a series of releases on the 2020 Tennessee Poll. Please see www.etsu.edu/asrl/tnpoll for additional analysis, methodological reporting, and margin of error calculations for sample and subgroup analysis.

About the Tennessee Poll

The Tennessee Poll is conducted by the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at East Tennessee State University. ASRL is directed by Dr. Kelly N. Foster, associate professor of sociology.

The Tennessee Poll is an annual public opinion poll funded by East Tennessee State University. The mission of The Tennessee Poll is to provide the citizens and governance of Tennessee with

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neutral, unbiased information on Tennesseans' perceptions of issues that impact their health, education, and quality of life.

Though the project has been internally funded to date, there is exists the possibility of outside researchers or organizations being given the option to purchase space for questions on future polls. Should this occur, any and all funding sources will be noted in the methodology report for that particular poll.

The Applied Social Research Lab is a member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO) and adheres to the reporting requirements of the American Association for Public Opinion Research Transparency Initiative standards in research reporting.

For detailed information on The Tennessee Poll, including methodology and additional analysis, please visit www.etsu.edu/asrl/tnpoll.

Survey Methodology

The Tennessee Poll uses random digit dialing (RDD) to ensure that all Tennesseans are represented. Phone numbers were drawn from a dual frame RDD sample of cell phone and landline numbers. Braun Research Inc. acquired the cell phone sample and completed the telephone interviews. It is important to note that this particular Tennessee Poll (poll #5) was fielded during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though ASRL maintains an active computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) lab for research purposes that utilizes ETSU student callers, the phone lab was closed due to state regulations during this time. Braun Research Inc. had capabilities and was utilizing secure remote calling with their phone interviewers during this time so in addition to acquiring the sample, they also completed the interviews.

The final sample includes a total of 618 completed interviews, 188 completed by landline (30.4% percent) and 430 completed by cell phone (69.6% percent). The final data are weighted by age, education, gender, and race to adjust for differential response rates in order to assure that the data are as closely representative of the state's actual adult population as possible. The margin of error for a sample of 618 is +/- 3.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample. Any subpopulation analysis entails a greater margin of error. For detailed methodology on The Tennessee Poll as well as margin of error reports and additional analysis, please go to www.etsu.edu/asrl/tnpoll.

About the Authors

Kelly N. Foster, Ph.D. Dr. Foster is an associate professor of sociology and director of the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) at ETSU. Her expertise is in survey research methodology and she has worked in public opinion research for 17 years. She is a member in good standing of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and currently serves on the executive council for the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO)

where ASRL is a member organization. She is a co-editor of *Polling America: An Encyclopedia of Public Opinion*, Second Edition, due out in September 2020.

Candace Forbes Bright, PhD. Dr. Bright is an assistant professor of sociology and faculty affiliate of the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) at ETSU. Her expertise is in research methodology and social issues, including public health and race. She also specializes in both quantitative and qualitatively methodologies, including social network analysis.

Morgan Kidd, M.A. Ms. Kidd is the assistant director for the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) at ETSU. She received her Master of Arts in Sociology from ETSU. She is an active member in good standing with the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and is active with the International Field Directors & Technologies Conference annually.

Madison Kosky, Student. Ms. Kosky is an accelerated bachelor's to master's degree student at ETSU, pursuing her Master of Arts in Sociology in the applied sociology concentration. In fall 2020, she will receive her Bachelor of Science in Clinical Psychology and continue working on her Master of Arts in Sociology.