



THE TENNESSEE POLL

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Tennesseans express growing concerns over state's direction, economy and social issues

Concerns differ across demographic groups and by region

JOHNSON CITY (September 20, 2024) – According to the July 2024 Tennessee Poll conducted by the Applied Social Research Lab at East Tennessee State University, the majority of Tennesseans believe the state is headed in the wrong direction (56%) compared to those who think things are going well (44%).

The poll, which surveyed 701 Tennesseans from July 10-17, included questions on topics related to health, education and quality of life. Republicans, Baby Boomers, men, East Tennesseans and people who are white are more likely to say that Tennessee is going in the right direction, while Independents, Democrats, younger generations, women, Middle and West Tennesseans, and persons of color are less likely to share that view. *See figures 1-2.*

Figure 1. Would you say things in Tennessee are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

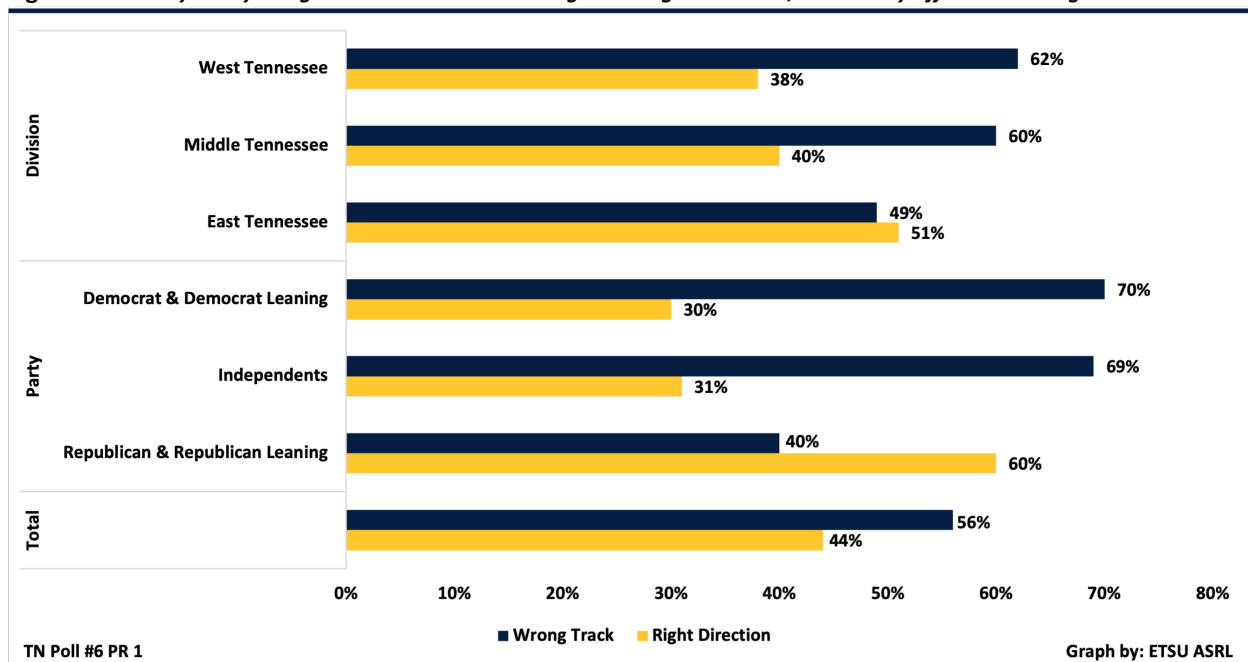
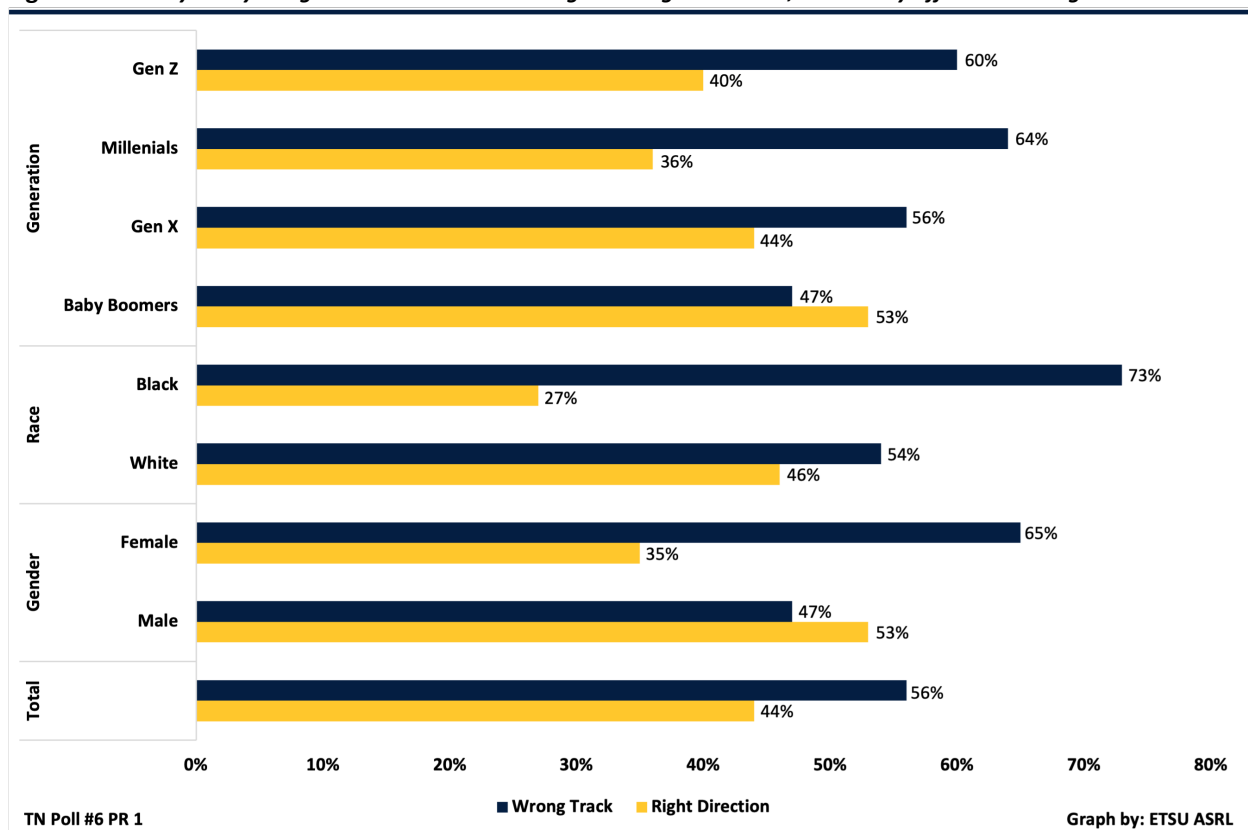


Figure 2. Would you say things in Tennessee are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?



Biggest Problems in Tennessee Today

Figure 3. Top 3 Biggest Problems Facing Tennessee Today

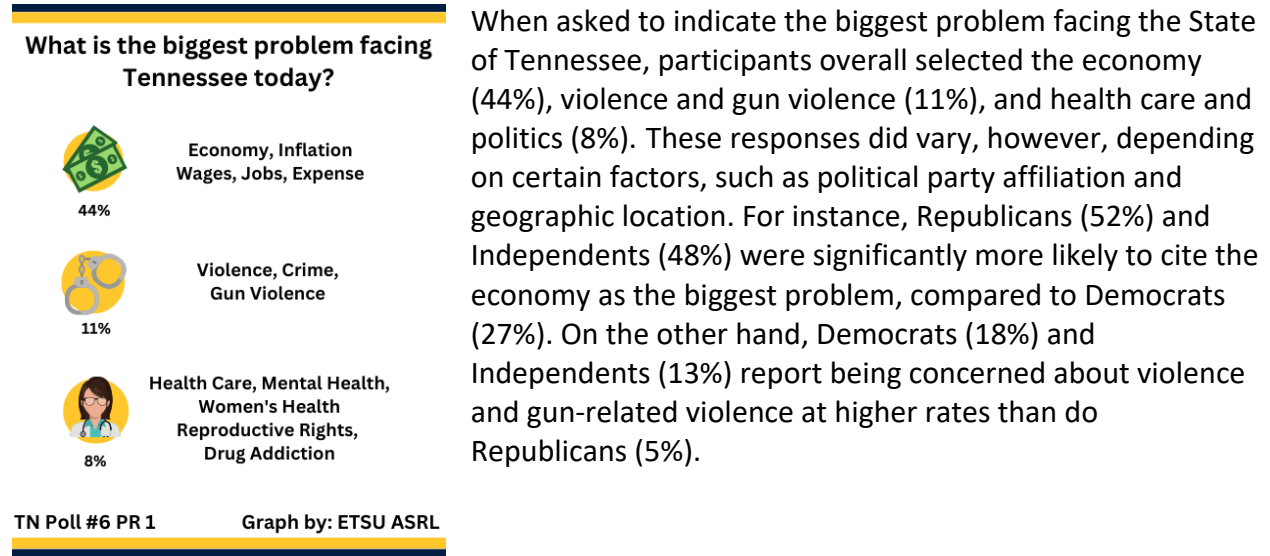
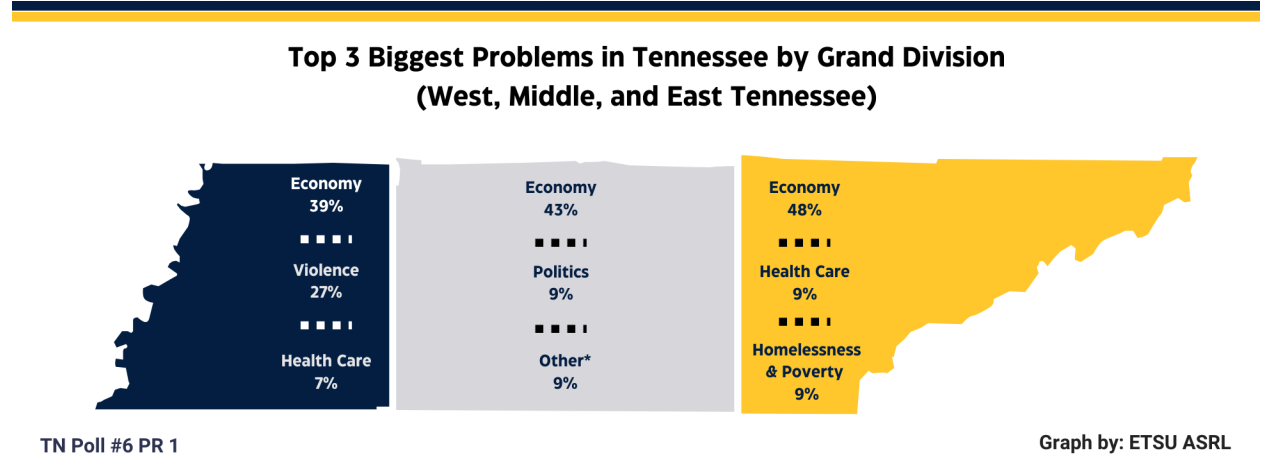


Figure 4. Top 3 Biggest Problems in Tennessee by Grand Division (West, Middle and East Tennessee)



* Other: marijuana legalization, hate, COVID, equal opportunities, and insurance not specified as health insurance.

Biggest Problems in the USA Today

Figure 5. *Top 3 Biggest Problems Facing the USA Today*

What is the biggest problem facing the USA today?



Economy, Inflation
Wages, Jobs, Expense

33%



Politics, Political Parties,
Upcoming Election,
Threat to Democracy,
Divided Country

27%



Immigration and Border
Issues

11%

TN Poll #6 PR 1

Graph by: ETSU ASRL

When asked about the nation as a whole, Tennesseans still cite the economy as the top concern, though slightly less frequently than when discussing state issues (33% compared to 44%). Many respondents echoed the concerns raised by one Tennessean who said “The biggest issue that the USA is facing today is that the system we have doesn’t work, not many people can afford to live properly and in a healthy way, most of us are struggling financially, through no fault of our own, (and) we try our best just to fail.”

After the economy, the second most common concern shifts to politics, politicians and the upcoming election (27%), followed by immigration and border issues (11%). These problems identified at the national level differ slightly from those identified for Tennessee.

Figure 6. *Top 3 Biggest Problems Facing the USA by Party Affiliation*



Economy, Inflation
Wages, Jobs, Expense



Politics, Politicians,
Political Parties,
The Election, Threat to
Democracy, Divided Country



Immigration and
Border Issues



All Tennesseans: 33%

17%

37%

41%



All Tennesseans: 27%

36%

25%

21%



All Tennesseans: 11%

1%

8%

19%



TN Poll #6 PR 1

Graph by: ETSU ASRL

Among the top three most frequently mentioned problems, there is a disconnect between Republicans, Independents and Democrats (*see Figure 6*). These patterns mimic national data, which generally shows high levels of concern for the country on issues regarding the economy and inflation, politics and immigration. Furthermore, the patterns found among Tennesseans mimic national patterns, whereby Republicans are more likely to see economic issues as a primary concern compared to Democrats¹.

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/05/23/top-problems-facing-the-u-s/>

Among Tennesseans, there are significant differences in perceptions of what the biggest problem is by various demographic characteristics. More women identify violent crime and gun violence (13% of women compared to 7% of men) and health care (8% compared to 4%) as top problems. White Tennesseans are more likely to identify the economy as the biggest issue than are Black Tennesseans (35% compared to 23%), who are more concerned about violence and gun violence than their White counterparts (21% compared to 7%). Younger Tennesseans, and Millennials in particular, are far more likely to state the economy as the biggest issue (47%) than are Baby Boomers (19%), Gen X (35%) or Gen Z (31%). For complete breakdowns of each question by demographic information see the Tennessee Poll web page at etsu.edu/tnpoll.

This is the first in a series of releases of data from The Tennessee Poll. We provide methodological information, margin of error estimates, as well as detailed tables with analysis on each question by different demographic categories. To find these, or to be added to our distribution list, please go to etsu.edu/tnpoll. Graphics are provided for press use.

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, professor of sociology.

The Tennessee Poll is an annual public opinion poll funded by ETSU. The mission of The Tennessee Poll is to provide the citizens and governance of Tennessee with 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 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 etsu.edu/tnpoll.

Survey Methodology

The Tennessee Poll uses a combination of landline and cell phone numbers randomly selected from a list of Tennessee residents aged 18 and older. Braun Research Inc. handled the cell phone sample and conducted the telephone interviews. The interviews took place between 1 p.m. and 8 p.m., with interviewers attempting to reach each respondent up to five times. The study was conducted from July 10-17, 2024. The average interview lasted 17 minutes.

The final sample consists of 701 completed interviews: 197 via landline (28%), 162 via cell phone (23%), and 342 via text to web (49%). The TTW option was introduced as a new method for residents to participate in the Tennessee Poll. The final data are weighted by age, education, sex, income 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 701 is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample. Any subpopulation analysis entails a greater margin of error. For detailed methodology, margin of error reports, and additional analysis, visit www.etsu.edu/tnpoll.

About the Authors

This press release was prepared by Drs. Kelly N. Foster, Candace Bright Hall-Wurst, Leslie McCallister and Trena Paulus. Graphics prepared by Ms. Morgan Jones Kidd and M. Rebecca Strasser. For information and biographies on the contributors to this release, please see etsu.edu/asrl.