



For Immediate Release
September 27, 2017

Contact: John Sewell
601-974-1019

Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey: Voters Concerned with Low School Funding, Open to Funding Options

Mississippians Express Mixed Views About State's Direction, Elected Leadership

Mississippi voters are uncertain about the direction of their state, wary of insufficient public school funding and overall quality, and open to considering new funding streams to provide for public education. These findings and more are detailed in the results of the first ever Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey.

Administered through a partnership between Millsaps College and Chism Strategies, the State of the State Survey was designed to gauge how Mississippians assess key actors and institutions in state government, where they would like to see the legislature focus their energy during the 2018 session, the state of public schools locally and across the state, and the public's receptiveness to generating new education revenue.

"The findings of the State of the State Survey may help inform policymakers in the weeks and months ahead in their efforts to tackle critical issues impacting our state and our citizens," said Dr. Nathan R. Shrader, assistant professor of political science at Millsaps. "Among the main lessons learned from this survey are that Mississippians are concerned about the state of public education and that nearly 60% believe that funding is currently too low. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, voters do not reflexively reject options for raising revenue to address the problem."

The survey finds that a plurality of Mississippians—40% overall—believe that the state is on the wrong track. The survey, which assessed job performance of three state-wide elected officials, showed strong majorities approve of the job performance of Governor Phil Bryant and Attorney General Jim Hood while there is more uncertainty among the public regarding Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves and significant disapproval of the State Legislature. Although voters are somewhat divided on what they see as the top priority facing the legislature, nearly 30% want to see an emphasis on fixing roads and bridges.

(more)

The survey, which involves a partnership between the Political Science Department and the Institute for Civic and Professional Engagement at Millsaps and Chism Strategies, looks to become a regular fixture of political discourse in the state.

“Millsaps has always played an important role in our state’s civic culture and we are delighted to aid the College in promoting informed discussion about key public policy matters,” said Brad Chism, senior partner at Chism Strategies. “We want this polling series to become a benchmark for all who are trying to better our state. We are confident in the survey methodology and representation of voters by age, gender, ethnicity, and partisan affiliation, and look forward to the broader exchange of ideas that arise from this effort.”

The survey was conducted September 14-18. Sample size of 509 with 32% cell phone interviews. MOE of 4.4%. Results weighted to reflect 2015 general election turnout for age, race, gender and partisanship.

Attached:

A) Survey Results

B) Summary Analysis

Q01 Do you believe Mississippi is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?

Q01 Direction	%
1 Right direction	36.5%
2 Wrong direction	40.2%
3 Unsure	23.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q02 The first person is Governor Phil Bryant. Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of his performance.

Q02 Bryant	%
1 Approve	53.5%
2 Disapprove	32.8%
3 Unsure	13.1%
9 Refused	0.7%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q03 The next person is Lt. Governor Tate Reeves.

Q03 Reeves	%
1 Approve	38.4%
2 Disapprove	31.8%
3 Unsure	29.1%
9 Refused	0.7%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q04 Attorney General Jim Hood

Q04 Hood	%
1 Approve	52.3%
2 Disapprove	25.0%
3 Unsure	21.6%
9 Refused	1.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q05 The Mississippi state legislature

Q05 Legislature	%
1 Approve	26.5%
2 Disapprove	45.4%
3 Unsure	27.5%
9 Refused	0.5%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q06 What should be the top priority for Mississippi's elected leaders working in Jackson? Should it be reducing the size of state government, fixing our state's roads and bridges, giving tax incentives and grants for companies that promise to create jobs, making health care more accessible and affordable, more funding for public schools, more funding for universities and community colleges, protecting traditional family values, or some other issue not mentioned here?

Q06 Priority	%
1 Reducing the size of state government	15.9%
2 Fixing roads and bridges	27.0%
3 Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that create jobs	13.3%
4 Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	13.9%
5 More funding for public schools	14.0%
6 More funding for universities and community colleges	2.5%
7 Protecting traditional family values	5.6%
8 Other	6.7%
9 Refused	1.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q07 How would you describe the quality of public schools overall here in Mississippi? Would you say they are excellent, good, only fair, poor, or are they failing our students?

Q07 Schools Statewide	%
1 Excellent	2.9%
2 Good	24.6%
3 Only fair	31.2%
4 Poor	17.2%
5 They are failing our students	17.5%
6 Do not know	6.3%
9 Refused	0.2%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q08 How would you describe the quality of public schools overall here in your community? Would you say they are excellent, good, only fair, poor, or are they failing our students?

Q08 Schools Local	%
1 Excellent	11.0%
2 Good	31.7%

3 Only fair	26.4%
4 Poor	15.6%
5 They are failing our students	12.1%
6 Do not know	3.2%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q09 Thinking about the entire state, how would you describe the level of funding for our public schools? Would you say that funding is too high, too low, or about right?

Q09 Funding	%
1 Too high	10.0%
2 Too low	55.6%
3 About right	21.4%
4 Do not know	13.0%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q10 First: Would you support increasing income tax rates for higher wage earners?

Q10 Income Tax	%
1 Yes	43.7%
2 No	40.1%
3 Unsure	16.2%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q11 Would you support raising the state gasoline tax?

Q11 Gasoline Tax	%
1 Yes	20.9%
2 No	71.7%
3 Unsure	7.2%
9 Refused	0.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q12 Would you support enacting higher tax rates on corporations?

Q12 Corporate Tax	%
1 Yes	45.8%
2 No	40.5%
3 Unsure	13.6%
9 Refused	0.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q13 Would you support creating a state lottery with funds dedicated to public schools?

Q13 Lottery	%
1 Yes	69.6%
2 No	23.0%
3 Unsure	7.1%
9 Refused	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q14 Do you support or oppose allowing parents to send their kids to public charter schools in Mississippi?

Q14 Charter Schools	%
1 Support	54.2%
2 Oppose	25.4%
3 Unsure	20.2%
9 Refused	0.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q15 How old were you at your most recent birthday?

Q15 Age	%
2 18 to 34	9.0%
3 35 to 44	14.0%
4 45 to 54	20.0%
5 55 to 64	24.0%
6 65 or older	31.0%
9 Refused	2.0%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q16 For statistical purposes, please tell us your ethnicity. Would you say you are African-American or black, Asian-American, Non-Hispanic white, Hispanic or Latino, or some other ethnicity not mentioned here?

Q16 Race	%
1 African American	29.0%
2 Asian American	1.1%
3 Non-Hispanic white	67.0%
4 Hispanic or Latino	0.5%
5 Other	2.4%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q17 Gender (coded by voice)

Q17 Gender	%
1 Male	44.5%
2 Female	55.5%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q18 For statistical purposes, please tell us about your educational attainment. Please tell us whether you have less than a high school education, graduated from high school, attended college but did not graduate, graduated from two year college, graduated from four year college, or obtained an advanced degree.

Q18 Education	%
1 Less than high school education	5.7%
2 High school graduate	21.1%
3 Attended college but did not graduate	22.0%
4 Graduated from two year college	16.5%
5 Graduated from four year college	18.0%
6 Obtained advanced degree	16.7%
9 Refused	0.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Q19 How would you describe your partisan affiliation when you vote. Would you say you are a strong Republican, lean Republican, neither Democrat nor Republican, lean Democrat, or a strong Democrat?

Q19 Party	%
1 Strong Republican	28.2%
2 Lean Republican	15.5%
3 Neither Democrat nor Republican	23.4%
4 Lean Democrat	6.3%
5 Strong Democrat	25.8%
9 Refused	0.8%
Grand Total	100.0%

Type	
Type	%
Landline	61.9%
Mobile	38.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Congressional District of Residence	
CD	%
1	22.1%
2	22.5%
3	30.4%
4	24.9%
Grand Total	100.0%

Summary of Findings

- Voters are less than optimistic about the future of the state.** 40% said the state was on the wrong track, while 36.5% said it was headed in the right direction. White voters have a much more positive view of the direction of the state (a net +17%, compared to a net -35% among African-Americans). Younger African-Americans in particular are unhappy with the current trajectory of the state as 66% of black respondents ages 18-54 say we're headed in the wrong direction, compared to just 15% who say we're headed in the right direction.
- Repairing roads and bridges was the most important issue for 27% of respondents, and it was the top issue among both Republicans and Democrats.** Making health care more accessible and affordable was the second most important issue for Democrats, and reducing the size of state government was the second most important issue among Republicans.
- Attorney General Jim Hood is the most popular elected official we polled, with a +27% net approval.** Hood is popular with both Democrats (+39%) and Republicans (+29%). These results are not entirely good news for the attorney general—nearly one-third of African-Americans who said they have an opinion of Hood disapprove of his performance in office. Likewise, 23% of strong Democrats are unsure of Hood, who has served as attorney general since 2004.
- While Lt. Governor Tate Reeves has a net positive approval rating, his name recognition and overall approval rate trail Hood's significantly.** Reeves' net approval overall is at just +6.6%. His net approval among Democrats is at -20%, -2% among Independents, and +39% among Republicans. Nearly a quarter of all strong Republican identifiers say they are unsure of Reeves while over 33% of those who lean Republican express that they are unsure of the sitting lieutenant governor.
- Looking towards a potential 2019 matchup, neither Reeves nor Hood has universal support among members of their party.** Among Democrats who have an opinion of both Hood, the sole statewide elected Democrat, and Reeves, the frontrunner for the 2019 GOP gubernatorial nominee, more than one-quarter disapprove of Hood's performance. Similarly, among Republicans who have opinions of both, 23% disapprove of Reeves. In the chart below, you can see what percentages of each group approve and disapprove of the two 2019 frontrunners.

Approval	GOP	Ind	Dem	All
Approve of Reeves; Disapprove of Hood	22.5%	16.9%	1.0%	12.3%
Approve of both	54.2%	29.6%	35.0%	42.5%
Disapprove of both	9.9%	29.6%	26.0%	21.3%
Approve of Hood; Disapprove of Reeves	13.4%	23.9%	38.0%	23.9%

However, Hood has an advantage over Reeves—the Democrats who don’t like Hood also don’t like Reeves, while most Republicans who dislike Tate Reeves approve of Hood’s performance as attorney general. Additionally, respondents who lean Republican approve of both Reeves—a Republican and Hood—a Democrat about equally. Hood also enjoys a +12% net approval among Independent voters compared to a -1% net approval among Independents for Reeves.

- **Hood is most popular in Northeast Mississippi, where his net approval is at +50%; Reeves is most popular on the Gulf Coast.** However, even in Reeves’ strongest region, he trails Hood in net approval (+23% for Reeves to +27% for Hood). Reeves’ net approval was in the negatives in the Jackson metro area; Hood was in the negatives in northwest Mississippi.

Region	Hood Net Approval	Reeves Net Approval
Coast	+26.6%	+22.8%
Delta	+28.6%	+3.6%
East MS	+16.4%	+1.4%
Jackson Metro	+36.9%	-2.9%
Northeast MS	+50.0%	+21.4%
Northwest MS	-2.6%	+7.7%
Pine Belt	+38.3%	+20.0%
Southwest MS	+17.5%	+7.5%

Note: the regional subsamples are small and we advise against sweeping conclusions based on these numbers.

- **Respondents tended to view their local schools more positively than schools statewide.** 43% of respondents said the local schools in their area were either “Excellent” or “Good,” while only 28% said the same of schools statewide. Only 3% of respondents rated Mississippi’s schools excellent. Opinions about the state’s education system varied by region—north Mississippians and respondents in the Pine Belt and on the Coast tended to have much more positive views of both their local schools and school statewide than respondents in the rest of the state.
- **A majority of Mississippians (56%) believe funding for our public schools is too low.** This includes a strong plurality of Republicans (45% said funding was too low, compared to 10% who said it was too high). Only 21% of respondents overall said that funding for schools was about right.
- **We asked respondents about several potential revenue sources to fund education, and of these, the gasoline tax increase was the least popular funding source we discussed.** Only 21% of respondents said they would support an increase in the tax; 71% opposed it. (It is important to note that this was not a rejection of a gas tax hike in general, but instead an aversion to funding education through this tax increase.)

- **An overwhelming number of voters said they would support the state instituting a lottery to fund education, 70%-23%.** Support was strong across partisan lines, though Democrats tend to be slightly more in favor of the proposal, with 73% supporting a lottery, compared to 65% of Republicans. Independents are also strong lottery supporters with 71% support among that segment of the electorate.
- **Pluralities of voters said they would support increases in the income and corporate tax rates if the money went to fund schools.** African-Americans tended to be more supportive, with 50% of black respondents saying they would support an income tax increase (to 24% who would not) and 47% supporting an increase to the corporate tax rate (to 25% who would not).
- **54% of respondents said they supported allowing parents to send their children to charter schools.** 25% opposed allowing this. 66% of Republicans and 53% of Independents said they would support it, compared to just 31% of Democrats.