



For Immediate Release  
July 12, 2018

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## **Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey: Voters Back Early Voting, Automatic Registration**

### ***Survey Finds Mixed Support for Electoral Reforms, State Elected Leaders***

JACKSON—Mississippians support several potential policy changes to help improve the state’s electoral process, including the expansion of early voting and automatically registering eligible voters upon turning 18 years of age. According to the newly released July 2018 Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey, voters strongly favor the state’s existing Voter ID law and are evenly split on whether state and municipal elections should be moved to weekends instead of Tuesdays. Meanwhile, the survey finds that voters are skeptical of treating Election Day as a holiday for Mississippi workers, using a vote-by-mail system, and allowing for online voter registration.

Voters ranked repairing the state’s roads and bridges as their top policy priority, making this the fourth consecutive quarter in which the electorate indicates that they want Mississippi’s leaders to address this problem above all else. According to the survey, 35% of respondents believe that the state is on the right track as opposed to 29% who sense that it is on the wrong track. The survey also includes approval ratings of numerous elected officials and finds that Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann remains among the most popular elected leaders in the Magnolia State. Nearly 50% of Mississippi voters approve of the job being done by Hosemann as opposed to just 14% who disapprove of his work.

“Mississippi is entering a three-year period of perhaps the most important consecutive election cycles that the state has seen in decades,” said Dr. Nathan Shrader, assistant professor of political science and director of American Studies at Millsaps College. “The 2018, 2019, and 2020 elections will be vitally important to the state and her citizens, yet voter participation in the 2018 primary and primary runoff elections was distressingly low. Our objective with this survey was to explore the extent to which Mississippians are open to modernizing or adjusting our current electoral system to perhaps improve our weak voter participation rates. Among our most consequential findings is that Mississippi voters have identified fixing roads and bridges and increasing funding for public schools as their top policy priorities for the fourth consecutive quarter. This demonstrates stability among the public’s policy preferences in these areas.”

Other key survey findings from the Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey:

### **Election Laws**

- 57% favor allowing for early voting while just 25% are opposed.
- 49% support and 37% oppose automatically registering eligible Mississippians to vote when they turn 18 years of age.
- 39% oppose moving all Mississippi elections to weekends while 38% support the move.
- 49% oppose making Election Day a holiday for workers in Mississippi and 42% are in favor.
- 56% support continuing with in-person voting while only 6% back using mail-in-voting. Another 37% favor utilizing a mixture of in-person and vote-by-mail elections.
- 81% favor maintaining Mississippi's Voter ID law.
- 47% oppose online voter registration while 38% support such a change.

### **Elected Official Ratings**

- 48% approve of Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann's job performance while 15% disapprove.
- 37% approve of State Treasurer Lynn Fitch's job performance while 17% disapprove.
- Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney has a job approval rating of 31% and a disapproval rating of 14%.
- 29% of Mississippi voters approve of Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson's work while 11% disapprove.
- Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley has a job approval rating of 29% and a disapproval rating of 13%.
- State Representative Mark Baker (a declared candidate for Attorney General in 2019) has an overall approval rating of 14% and a disapproval rating also of 14%.
- Only 22% approve of the work being done by the State Legislature with 35% disapproving. The difference between those who approve and disapprove of the legislature's performance is consistent with the previous two State of the State Surveys.

### **Policy Priorities**

- 25% of respondents say that fixing roads and bridges is their most important priority. This is the fourth consecutive quarter where it has topped the list of concerns expressed by the voters.
- More funding for public schools (22%) and making healthcare more affordable and accessible (18%) were the second and third highest ranking policy priorities.

Chism Strategies is pleased to team with Millsaps College to measure public sentiment on different ways to make voting easier in our state," said company president Brad Chism. "We look forward to the legislature's consideration of all the options for

increasing voter participation in Mississippi and this data should make for an informed debate.”

The survey was conducted June 28-29. The sample size of 623 with 67% of interviews conducted via landline and 34% via cell phone. The survey has a Margin of Error of +/- 4.0 %. Results were weighted to reflect likely 2018 general election turnout for age, race, gender, and partisanship.

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Attached:

- A) Summary of Findings
- B) Survey Results

***Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey  
Summary of Findings: July 12, 2018***

- **Mississippians remain divided as to whether the state is moving in the right or wrong direction.** According to the survey, 35% of respondents believe that the state is on the right track as opposed to 28% who sense that it is on the wrong track. Although the July State of the State Survey recorded a substantial increase among those who are unsure of which direction Mississippi is headed, the margin between the right track and wrong track responses remains consistent (+6% in favor of the right direction in July and January, +7% in April).

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

<b>Date of Poll</b>	<b>Right Direction</b>	<b>Wrong Direction</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Net Right/Wrong Direction</b>
<b>Sep-17</b>	37%	40%	23%	-3%
<b>Jan-18</b>	42%	36%	22%	+6%
<b>Apr-18</b>	44%	37%	20%	+7%
<b>Jul-18</b>	35%	29%	37%	+6%

Clear differences remain in the perception of Mississippi voters based upon their race, gender, education level, and partisan affiliation. Those most likely to see the state heading in the right direction tend to include men (+24%), white voters (+26%), those with at least a high school education (+26%), Strong Republicans (+55%), and those who lean towards the GOP (+19%). Both the youngest and oldest subsets of voters tend to believe that the state is moving in the right direction (+11% among 18-34 and +17% among those 65 and older). Conversely, those most likely to suggest that the state is heading in the wrong direction include black voters (-32%), those with less than a high school education (-6%) or an advanced degree (-4%), Strong Democrats (-41%), and those who lean Democratic (-44%). Voters between 35-44 years of age were the least optimistic about the state’s direction (-9%).

- **Fixing the state’s roads and bridges continues to top the list of the electorate’s policy priorities for the fourth consecutive Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey. Nearly a quarter of all respondents rated infrastructure repair as their top priority.** Support for fixing the state’s road and bridges was the top priority selected by voters 55 and older, both white and black voters alike, men and women respondents, voters of all educational attainment levels except for those with advanced degrees, Strong Republicans, those who lean Republican, and Independents. Fixing roads and bridges was tied as the top priority with improving healthcare access and affordability among voters leaning Democratic. Increasing funding for public schools was the top priority for voters between 18-44 and those with advanced degrees. Meanwhile, Strong Democrats reported that making healthcare access and affordability matters most to them.

***What should be the top priority for Mississippi's elected leaders working in Jackson?***

<b>Policy Priority</b>	<b>Sep-17</b>	<b>Jan-18</b>	<b>Apr-18</b>	<b>Jul-18</b>
Reducing the size of state government	16%	11%	12%	8%
Fixing roads and bridges	27%	23%	29%	25%
Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that create jobs	13%	10%	9%	12%
Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	14%	21%	14%	18%
More funding for public schools	14%	19%	20%	22%
More funding for universities and community colleges	3%	3%	3%	3%
Protecting traditional family values	6%	7%	11%	8%
Other	7%	6%	2%	4%

- **Mississippians are open to certain changes to modernize elections and the electoral process in the Magnolia State while clearly skeptical of others.** The low voter participation rates in the June 2018 primary and runoff primary elections (13.3% and 6.8%, respectively) present an opportunity to consider policies being tested in other states to increase participation and provide greater opportunities for voters to engage in the electoral system.

The Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey sought to examine the receptiveness of Mississippi voters to a number of reform proposals: Early Voting (currently allowed in 37 states<sup>1</sup>), Online Voter Registration (currently done in 37 states and DC, with another having recently approved such a provision<sup>2</sup>), Automatic Voter Registration (12 states and DC have approved rules to institute this type of reform<sup>3</sup>), Election Day Holiday (proposed last year by the California legislature<sup>4</sup>), and Weekend Elections (proposed last year by Congresswoman Louise Slaughter and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute<sup>5</sup>).

Mississippians responded favorably to early voting (+32%) and automatic registration (+12%), yet are divided nearly evenly on the question of shifting elections to

<sup>1</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, 8/17/17 (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>)

<sup>2</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, 12/7/17 (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>)

<sup>3</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, 4/18/18 (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration.aspx>)

<sup>4</sup> *The Mercury News*, 2/16/17 (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/16/california-bill-would-make-election-day-a-state-holiday/>)

<sup>5</sup> *USA Today*, 8/5/17 (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/08/05/fight-voter-suppression-move-election-day-to-weekend-slaughter-ornstein-column/537456001/>)

weekends (-1%). A plurality disapproves of online voter registration (-9%) and treating Election Day as a holiday (-7%).

***Mississippians Assess Electoral Reform Proposals***

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
Early Voting	57%	25%	18%
Online Registration	38%	47%	15%
Automatic Registration	49%	37%	14%
Election Holiday	42%	49%	10%
Weekend Elections	38%	39%	24%

Several patterns emerge from the survey findings:

- Early voting has higher levels of support than opposition among voters of all age groups, especially those between 18-64 years of age. Either a majority or plurality of voters across racial, gender, and partisan lines endorse early voting for Mississippi, including women (+34%), men (18%), black voters (50%), and white voters (19%).
- Automatic voter registration enjoys robust support among women (+16%), black voters (+55%), Democratic Leaners (+70%), and Strong Democrats (+55%). Independent voters also slightly favor automatic voter registration (+2%), as do a majority of voters between 18-54 years of age. A plurality of voters 55 to 64 also favor the idea.
- Online voter registration is chiefly popular with Strong Democrats (+11%), Democratic Leaners (+5%), those 18-34 years of age (+33%), 35-44 years of age (+27%), and those with advanced degrees (+7%). The concept is unpopular among Independents (-10%), Strong Republicans (-51%), Republican Leaners (-29%), white voters (-34%), voters between 55-64 (-21%), those over 65 (-46%), and those with less than a four-year college degree.
- Mississippi voters are largely unconvinced about the possibility of moving to a vote-by-mail system for elections, which is growing in usage across the nation.<sup>6</sup> Overall, 56% favor maintaining the current use of in-person voting only, 6% support moving to a complete mail-in election system, and 37% support mixing the two approaches. Notably, a majority of all Republican voters—and a slim majority of Independents—favor maintaining the status quo of in-person voting for Mississippi elections while a majority of Democrats back utilizing a mix of in-person and vote-by-mail for elections. Similarly, while nearly 70% of white voters favor in-person voting only, 51% of black voters support exploring a mix of the two systems. Voters with less formal

<sup>6</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, 1/12/17 (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/all-mail-elections.aspx>)

education were more receptive to moving exclusively vote-by-mail than those with more years of education.

- 62% of Mississippi voters supported the 2011 referendum adding a Voter ID provision to the state's constitution. Today, 81% of Mississippians say that they favor the existing law, including a majority of voters regardless of race, gender, partisan identification, age, and education level. The weakest levels of support for Voter ID are found among those with less than a high school degree, black voters, those 18-34 years of age, and Democrats.
  
- Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann enjoys an approval rating of +33%, remarkably steady when compared to the +34% rating he received in the Millsaps College-Chism Strategies Survey conducted in January 2018. Voters across the partisan divide largely approve of Hosemann: +66% rating among Strong Republicans, +38% among Republican Leaners, +22% with Independents, +17% among Democratic Leaners, and +8% among Strong Democrats. Hosemann also holds a +15% approval with black voters, +49% with white voters, +49% among men, and +28% among women. Hosemann enjoys a particularly strong level of approval among older voters, with a +48% approval rating among Mississippians 65 and older.
  
- Mississippi State Treasurer Lynn Fitch's previous +19% approval rating from our January survey also remains steady at +20% this month. She enjoys sturdy levels of support among Strong Republicans (+52%) and Republican Leaners (+32%). Independents also approve of Fitch (+13%) along with Democratic Leaners (+14%), although Strong Democrats voice their disapproval of Fitch's performance (-18%). Fitch also maintains an overall positive evaluation among men, women, white voters, and voters of all age groups.
  
- Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney boasts a +17% approval, yet a majority of 56% were unsure of his performance. Chaney does particularly well among men (+31%), high school graduates (+23%), Republican Leaners (+32%), and Strong Republicans (+31%).
  
- Recently appointed Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson has a +18% approval rating with a majority of 59% saying they are unsure of his work thus far. Gipson's highest net approval comes from Strong Republicans (+46%), white voters (+30%), men (+28%), 18-34 year olds (+27%), voters 65 and older (+22%), and high school graduates (+24%). Meanwhile, Gipson's lowest approval score comes from Strong Democrats (-18%).
  
- The survey finds that Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley has a +16% approval rating overall, but 58% are unsure of him. Presley's pockets of support come from Strong Republicans (+34%), Republican Leaners (+19%), white voters (+25%), men (+24%), those with a four-year degree (+24%), and those who attended college

but did not finish (+20%). As the only Democratic elected official tested in the survey, Presley has stronger approval scores among Republicans than among traditional Democratic constituencies, as he has an even level of approval those who Lean Democratic as well as black voters. Presley’s approval rating among Strong Democrats stands at +3%.

- State Representative Mark Baker, who recently announced a run for Attorney General in 2019 has a +1% approval rating, while 73% could not decide if they approve or disapprove. Although Baker appears to be a largely unknown figure at this point in time, Strong Republicans (+12%) and those with less than a high school degree (+15%) respond most favorably to him. Meanwhile, Baker’s weakest levels of approval come from Strong Democrats (-12%) and those with two-year degrees (-11%).
- **The Mississippi State Legislature remains consistently unpopular with the electorate.** Although a smaller share of the voters today say that they disapprove of the legislature since the initial Millsaps-Chism Survey last September, a smaller share also reports to approve of the legislature’s performance. There has also been a spike in the percentage of respondents who say that they are unsure of the legislature’s work since April when the 2018 Legislative Session concluded, indicating that the public may be evaluating the new laws enacted during the session, many of which have received news coverage as of late because of their recent enactment dates. Overall, only Strong Republicans approve of the legislature (+8%). Voters with a high school degree or less than a high school degree, those who attended but did not graduate from college, and those 65 and older are almost evenly divided on the legislature’s performance while the rest of the electorate largely disapproves.

*Mississippi State Legislature Approval Rating*

<b>Date of Poll</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Net Approve/Disapprove</b>
<b>Sep-17</b>	27%	45%	28%	-18%
<b>Jan-18</b>	26%	38%	36%	-12%
<b>Apr-18</b>	30%	41%	26%	-11%
<b>Jul-18</b>	22%	35%	43%	-12%



*Millsaps College-Chism Strategies State of the State Survey  
Weighted Toplines, July 12, 2018*

<b>Q01 Which direction do you think Mississippi is headed? Would you say the right direction, the wrong direction, or are you unsure?</b>	
<b>Q01 Direction</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Right direction	34.7%
2 Wrong direction	28.8%
3 Unsure	36.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**I'm going to read you a list of names and organizations.  
For each one, please tell me whether you approve,  
disapprove, or are unsure of their performance.**

<b>Q02 Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney. Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of his performance or if you are unsure.</b>	
<b>Q02 Chaney</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Approve	30.7%
2 Disapprove	13.6%
3 Unsure	55.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q03 Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson</b>	
<b>Q03 Gipson</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Approve	29.3%
2 Disapprove	11.3%
3 Unsure	59.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q04 Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley</b>	
<b>Q04 Presley</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Approve	28.6%
2 Disapprove	13.1%
3 Unsure	58.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q05 State Treasurer Lynn Fitch</b>		
<b>Q05 Fitch</b>	<b>%</b>	
1 Approve		37.1%
2 Disapprove		16.7%
3 Unsure		46.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q06 Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann</b>		
<b>Q06 Hosemann</b>	<b>%</b>	
1 Approve		48.0%
2 Disapprove		14.6%
3 Unsure		37.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q07 State Representative Mark Baker</b>		
<b>Q07 Baker</b>	<b>%</b>	
1 Approve		13.6%
2 Disapprove		13.2%
3 Unsure		73.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q08 Mississippi state legislature</b>		
<b>Q08 Legislature</b>	<b>%</b>	
1 Approve		22.4%
2 Disapprove		35.0%
3 Unsure		42.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>

**Q09 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?**

<b>Q09 Priority</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Reducing the size of state government	8.1%
2 Fixing roads and bridges	24.5%
3 Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that create jobs	11.7%
4 Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	18.1%
5 More funding for public schools	21.8%
6 More funding for universities and community colleges	3.1%
7 Protecting traditional family values	8.4%
8 Other	4.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Next, I am going to ask you several questions about voting and elections in Mississippi.**

**Q10 Many states allow early voting to encourage more citizens to participate in elections. Any eligible voter can cast a ballot at designated locations before election day. Mississippi does not allow for early voting in any elections. Do you support or oppose allowing early voting in Mississippi elections, or are you unsure?**

<b>Q10 Early</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Support	56.6%
2 Oppose	25.1%
3 Unsure	18.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q11 How do you feel about allowing eligible Mississippi citizens to register to vote online? Would you support online voter registration, oppose it or are you unsure?**

<b>Q11 Online</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Support	37.6%
2 Oppose	47.2%
3 Unsure	15.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q12 How do you feel about automatically registering eligible Mississippians to vote when they turn 18 years of age? Would you support automatic voter registration, oppose it or are you unsure?**

<b>Q12 Automatic</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Support	49.2%
2 Oppose	36.8%
3 Unsure	14.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q13 Three states currently conduct all elections using mail-in ballots while others have considered using a mix of in-person voting and vote-by-mail. Mississippi does not permit any voting by mail. How would you like to see Mississippi address the possibility of voting through the mail?**

<b>Q13 Mail</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Continue in-person voting only	56.3%
2 Move to vote-by-mail only	6.4%
3 Use a mix of in-person voting and vote-by-mail	37.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q14 How do you feel about Mississippi's current law requiring photo ID in order to vote? Do you support the photo ID requirement, oppose it or are you unsure?**

<b>Q14 ID</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Support	81.2%
2 Oppose	14.1%
3 Unsure	4.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q15 Do you believe that Election Day should be treated as a holiday for Mississippi workers?**

<b>Q15 Holiday</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Yes	41.7%
2 No	48.7%
3 Unsure	9.6%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q16 Would you support or oppose moving all Mississippi elections to weekends instead of Tuesdays?**

<b>Q16 Weekends</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Support	37.5%
2 Oppose	39.0%
3 Unsure	23.5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q17 Age Range**

<b>Q17 Age Range</b>	<b>%</b>
2 18 to 34	10.3%
3 35 to 44	14.7%
4 45 to 54	20.4%
5 55 to 64	23.6%
6 65 or older	31.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q18 Race**

<b>Q18 Race</b>	<b>%</b>
1 African American	33.0%
2 Asian American	1.3%
3 Caucasian	63.0%
4 Hispanic or Latino	0.1%
5 Other	2.6%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q19 Gender**

<b>Q19 Gender</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Male	44.5%
2 Female	54.4%
3 Nonbinary	1.1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q20 Education</b>	
<b>Q20 Education</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Less than high school education	5.2%
2 High school graduate	24.2%
3 Attended college but did not graduate	17.4%
4 Graduated from two year college	12.3%
5 Graduated from four year college	22.5%
6 Obtained advanced degree	18.4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Q21 Party</b>	
<b>Q21 Party</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Strong Republican	31.0%
2 Lean Republican	18.4%
3 Neither Democrat nor Republican	19.3%
4 Lean Democrat	7.6%
5 Strong Democrat	23.8%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>