

Vanderbilt University Poll
Executive Summary
December 12, 2012

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Vanderbilt University has conducted its fifth Vanderbilt Poll of Tennesseans to find out what they think about our political leaders and pressing issues facing the state and federal government. It is imperative to gauge the public's thinking as elected leaders grapple with tough problems that face both the state and the nation.

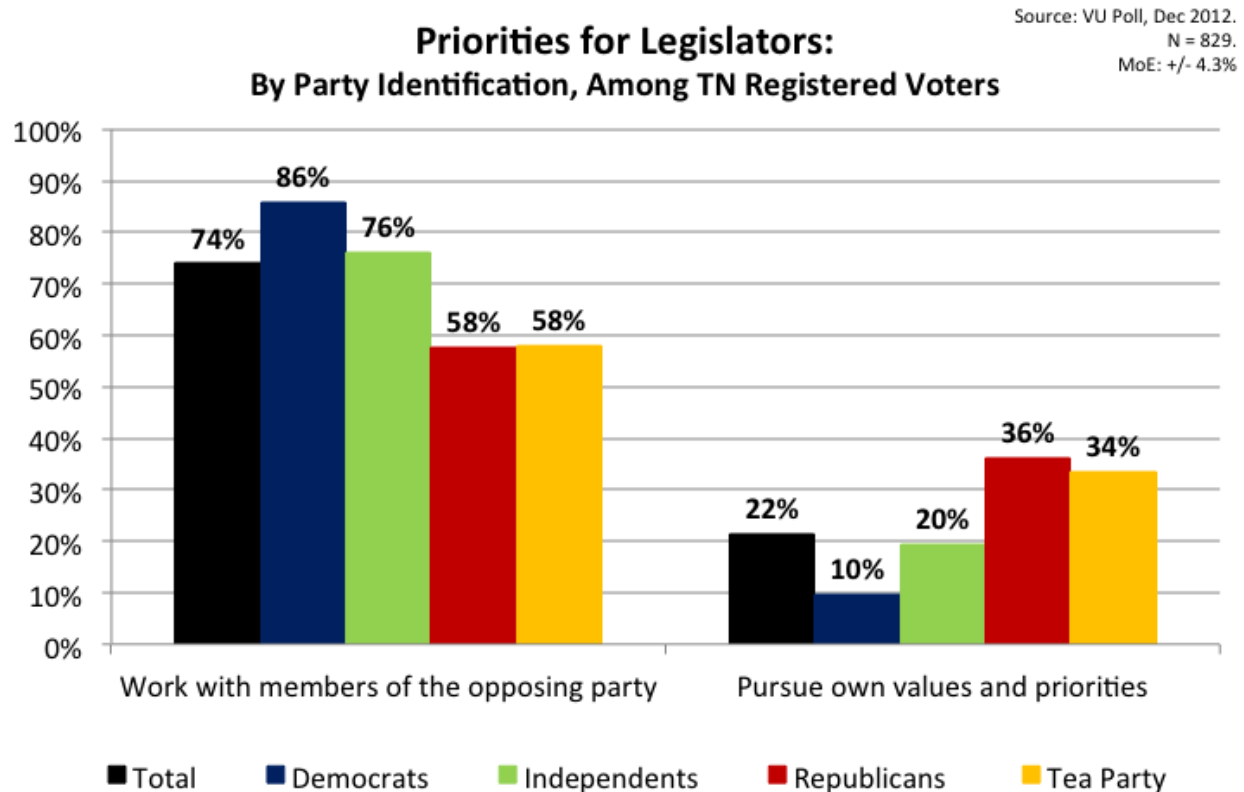
We obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 829 registered voters. Telephone interviews were conducted by landlines and cell phones. The survey was conducted in English by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) from Nov. 27 to Dec. 9, 2012. The margin of error for the weighted sample is ± 4.3 percentage points.

There are more than 45 different questions asked in this poll. The key highlights are:

- Tennesseans overwhelmingly want their elected leaders to work with members of the opposing party even if it means they need to compromise on their values and priorities
- Tennesseans continue to give high marks to their U.S. senators and governor
- Tennesseans are prepared to support tax increases for wealthy Americans, but not an increase in the eligibility age for Medicare
- Tennesseans continue to see the economy as the top priority of the state, with education and health care vying for second place. Social issues such as guns, immigration, and gay rights are a distant fourth
- Tennesseans want the state to run the Health Care Exchange that stems from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and support is stronger among Republicans. The state is evenly split on the expansion of Medicaid that is tied to the ACA
- Tennesseans strongly support charter schools
- Tennesseans rate their local public schools higher than they do public schools in general
- Tennesseans believe public school teachers are not paid enough money
- Tennesseans narrowly support allowing individuals to carry guns in their vehicles while on their employer's private property
- Tennesseans overwhelmingly oppose the state telling private entities how to operate and favor private entities being free to make their own policies
- Tennesseans favor letting citizens, rather than the governor, choose judges
- Tennesseans overwhelmingly oppose adopting "closed" primaries

Support for Compromise Among Politicians

There has been a lot of talk about the seeming inability of politicians from the different parties to work together to solve the issues that currently face the nation and the state. At issue is whether politicians should work with members of the opposing party, or whether they should pursue their own values and priorities.

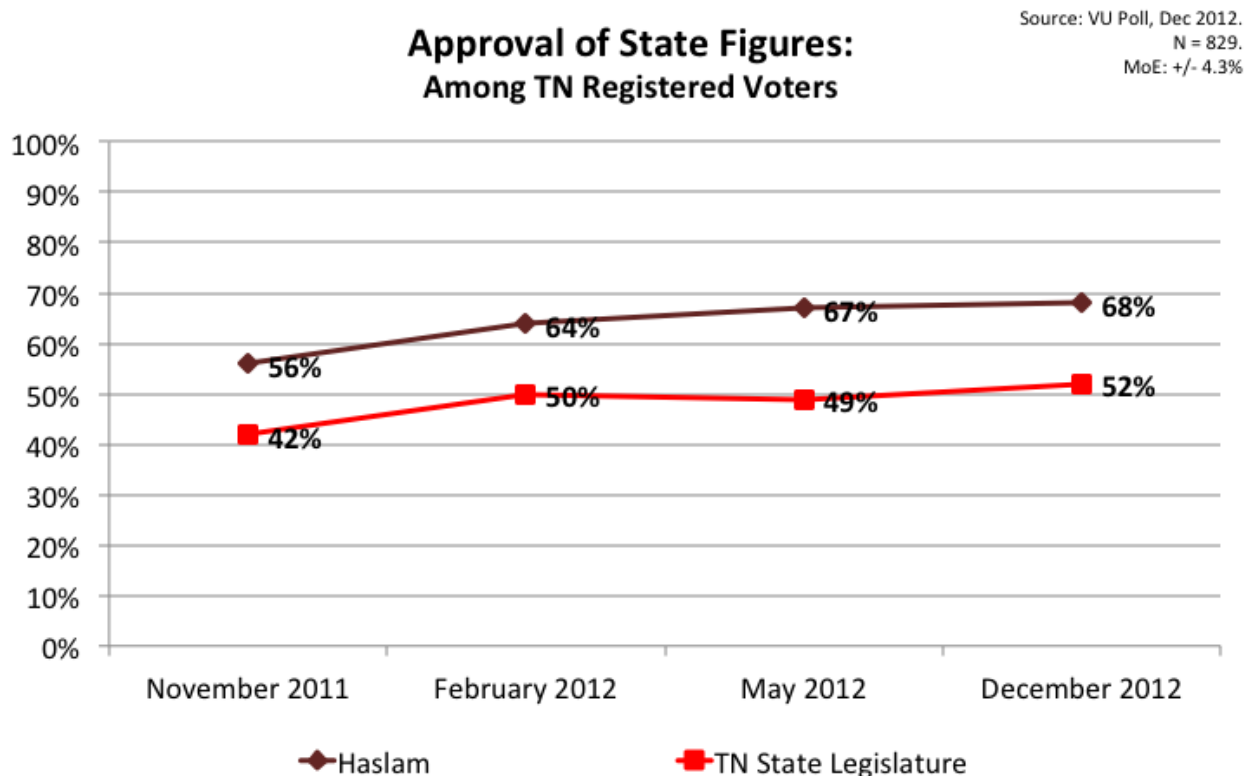


Regardless of party, a clear majority of Tennessee voters want their national and state legislators to work with members of the opposition party. The support for compromise is highest among self-identified Democrats (86%) and independents (76%), but compromise is also widely supported by Republicans (58%) and self-identified members of the Tea Party (58%).

Approval of State Political Figures

Governor Haslam's support continues to grow among registered Tennessee voters. As of December 2012, 68% approve of his performance. His support is strong across party lines – 60% of Democrats, 62% of independents and 81% of Republicans approve of his performance as Governor.

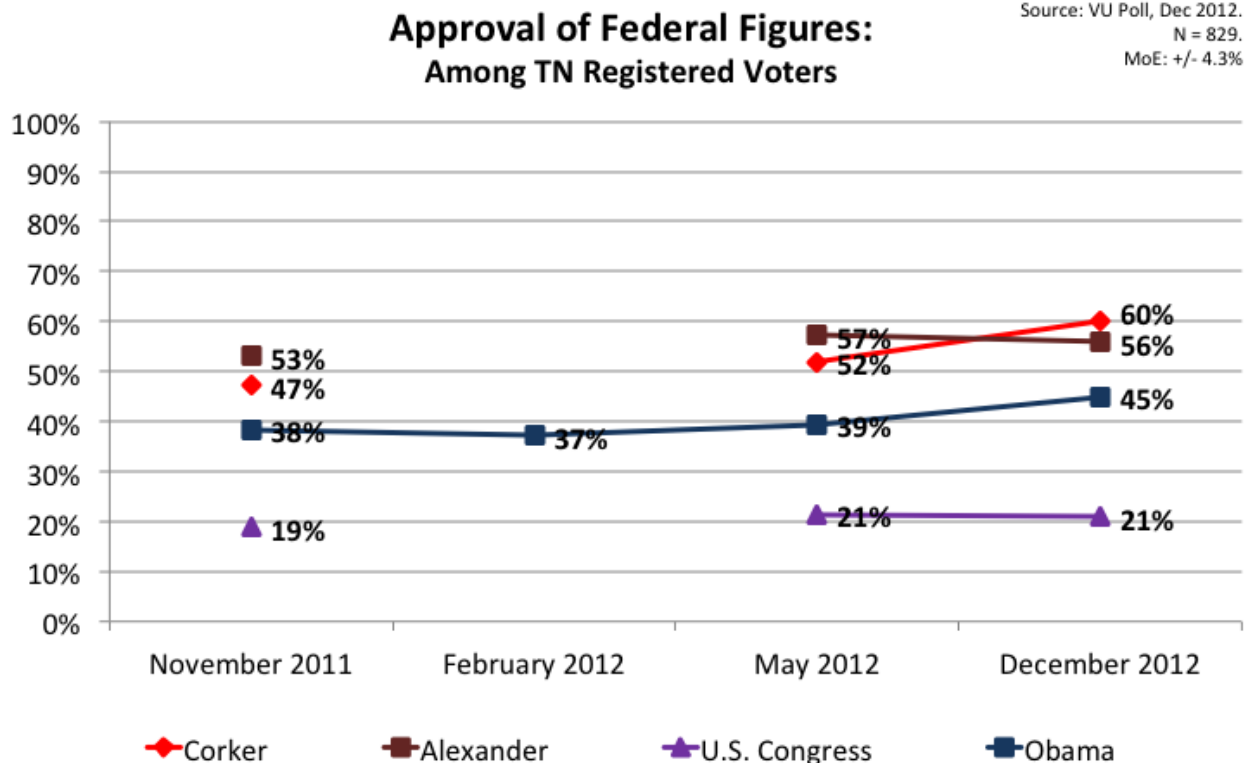
A narrow majority of registered voters (52%) approve of the Tennessee state legislature. This support, however, is much more divided along party lines. 67% of Republicans approve of the performance of the state legislature, but only 49% of independents and 44% of Democrats approve of the job it is doing.



Approval of National Political Figures

Registered voters in Tennessee continue to support Senators Alexander and Corker by a wide margin. Likely due to the recent election contest and his recent efforts to broker a deal over the “fiscal cliff,” Senator Corker’s approval has increased to 60% while the approval of Senator Alexander continues to hold steady around 56%.

Reflecting a national trend, President Obama’s approval has increased in recent months, but only 45% indicate that they approve of his performance. Registered voters in Tennessee continue to disapprove of the job done by the U.S. Congress and only 21% say they approve of its performance – a level of support that had remained largely unchanged since November 2011.



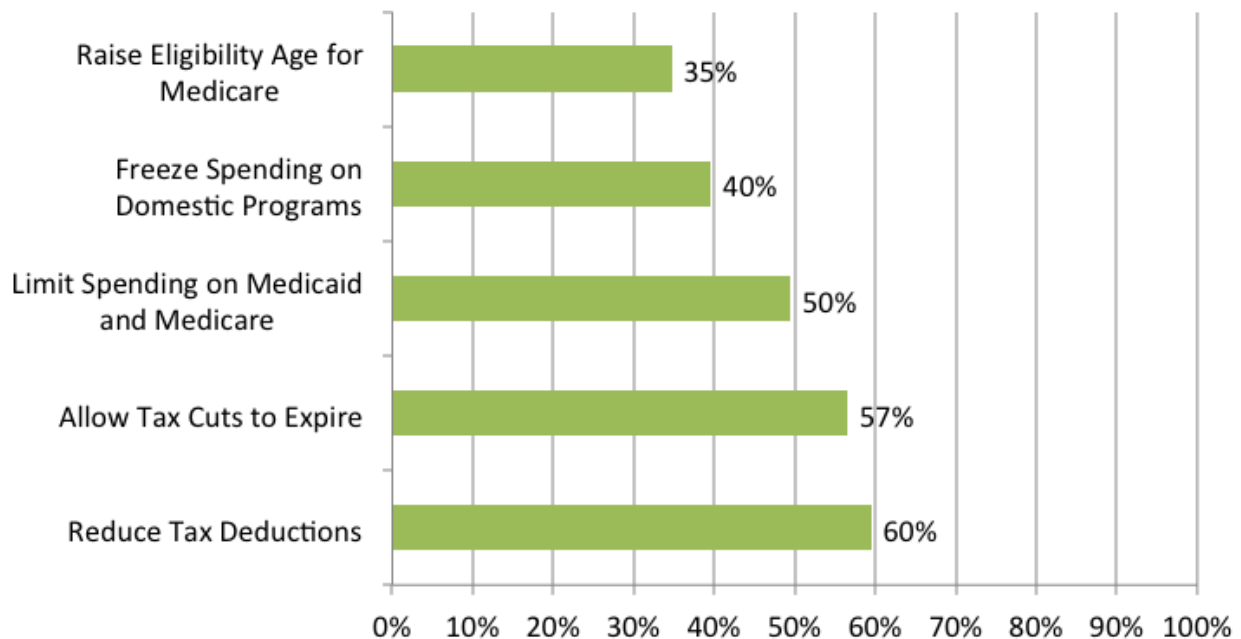
Solutions to the Federal Budget Deficit

The national economy is a large concern for Tennesseans and 66% of registered Tennessee voters think that the national economy is either “Fairly Bad” or “Bad.” This represents a modest improvement from May 2012, when 75% held a similar view of the national economy. An important issue for the national economy is the budget deficit and the impending “fiscal cliff” and Tennesseans provided their opinions on what they would like to see happen.

When provided with a list of frequently discussed options for reducing the deficit, registered Tennessee voters were far more willing to reduce tax deductions for those making more than \$250,000 (60%) and allowing tax cuts to expire for those making more than \$250,000 (57%) than they were on raising the eligibility age for Medicare (35%) or reducing federal spending on domestic programs (40%). Voters were evenly split on whether to limit spending on Medicaid and Medicare (50%). These results are very similar to the views expressed in recent national samples.

**Percent Willing to ... to Reduce the Deficit:
Among TN Registered Voters**

Source: VU Poll, Dec 2012.
N = 829.
MoE: +/- 4.3%

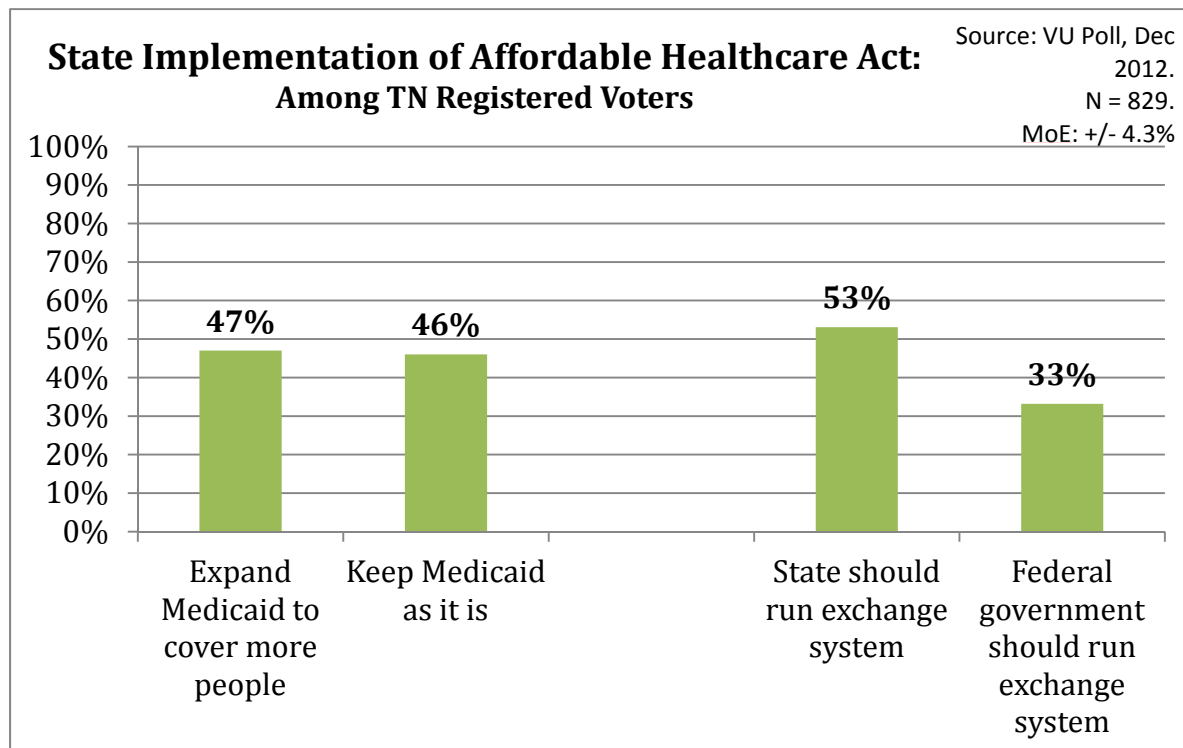


Breaking the numbers down further, there are partisan divides about how best to reduce the deficit. Among Democrats, increasing revenues by limiting tax deductions (69%) and allowing the tax cuts to expire (66%) are the most popular options; among Republicans the most popular options are limiting spending on Medicaid and Medicare (65%) and freezing spending on domestic programs (60%). Independents largely prefer the same solutions as Democrats, but with a lower level of support for limiting tax deductions (60%) and allowing the tax cuts to expire (56%).

Implementing the Affordable Care Act

We asked two questions about the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in Tennessee to see what Tennesseans thought about who should run the health care exchanges that are required by the law as well as whether the state should accept federal support to extend Medicaid coverage to uninsured Tennesseans.

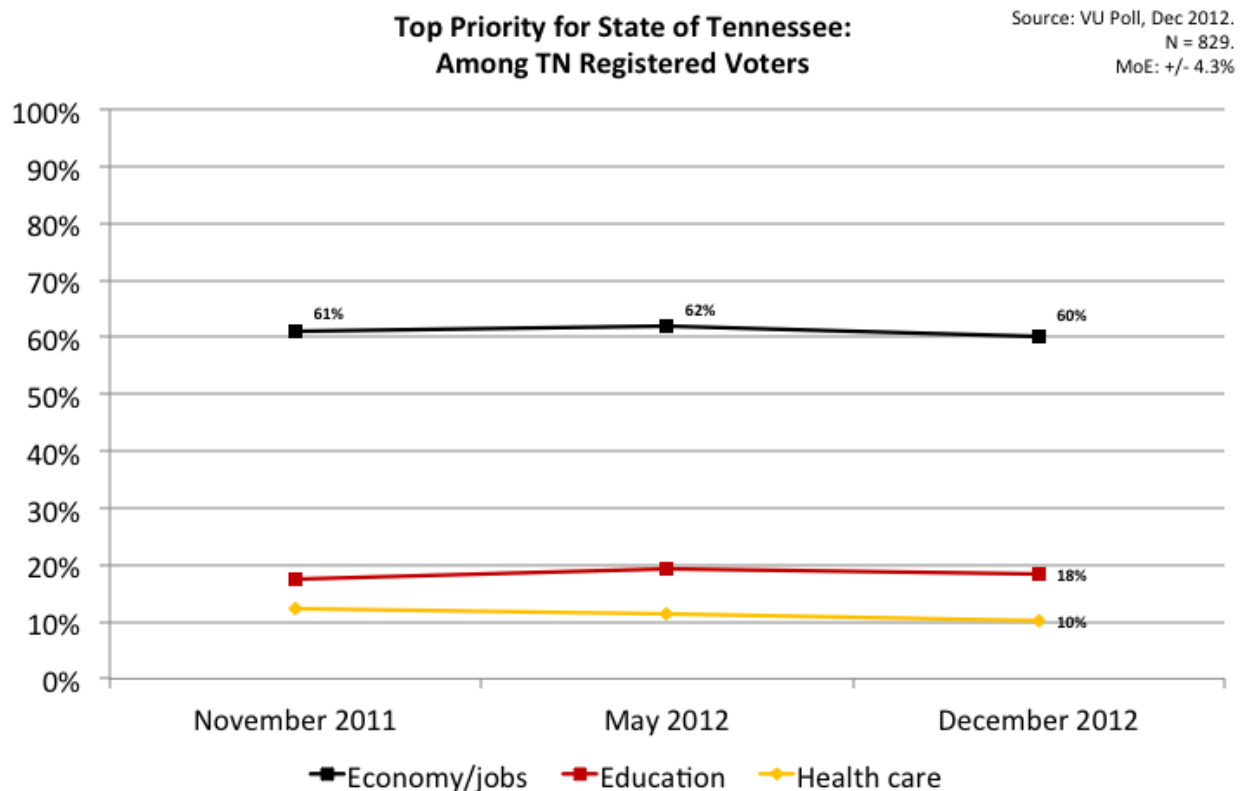
In terms of who should run the required health care exchanges, 53% of registered voter would rather have the State of Tennessee create and run its own health care exchange system, while 33% would rather have the state use the health care exchange system created by the federal government. Breaking this opinion down by party reveals that Republicans are the most enthusiastic about having the state run the exchange (73%). Independents would also prefer that the state run the exchange (59%). Most Democrats (59%), on the other hand, would prefer that the federal government run the health care exchange.



The public is more divided as to whether Tennessee should accept federal funding and expand Medicaid to cover more low-income individuals who currently lack health insurance. Slightly more registered voters support expanding Medicaid than those who oppose doing so – 47% to 46% - but the difference is not statistically distinguishable. There are also clear partisan differences of opinion – 65% of registered Republican voters want to keep Medicaid as it is with no change in who will be covered by the program, but 72% of Democrats want to expand Medicaid. Independents are evenly divided on the question and 48% favor each option.

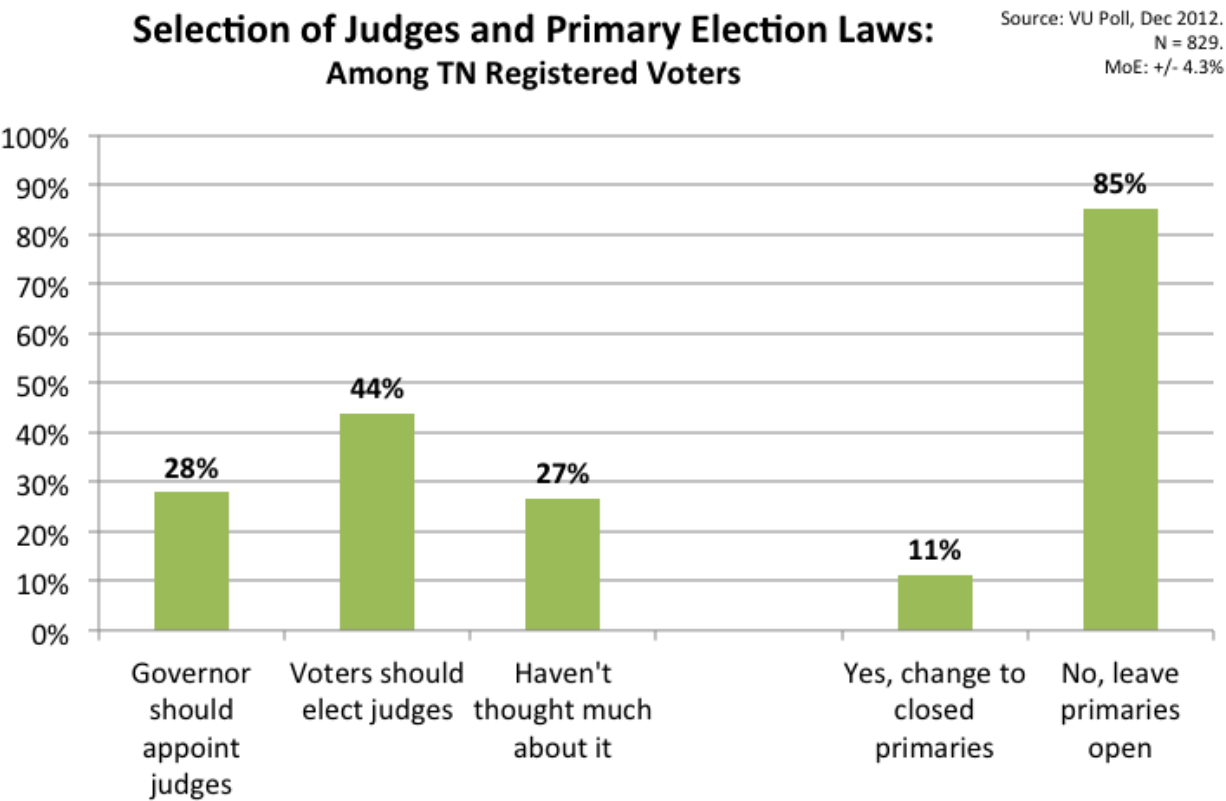
State Priorities:

Tennesseans once again report that the economy is their top concern. Nearly 60% report that the economy is the top priority for state government and this has not changed since we first asked the question of registered voters in November of 2011. Concerns about education and health care remain the second and third most important priorities at 18% and 10% respectively. Priorities dealing with social issues (4%), immigration (4%), and guns (1%) continue to rank far below the leading concerns that are shared across party lines.



Elections in Tennessee:

We asked two questions relating to elections in Tennessee. First, we asked about the support for selecting judges via elections rather than the current practice of allowing the Governor to appoint judges. While 27% of registered voters had not thought much about the issue and they declined to answer, more thought that voters should select judges than the Governor by a 44% to 28% margin.

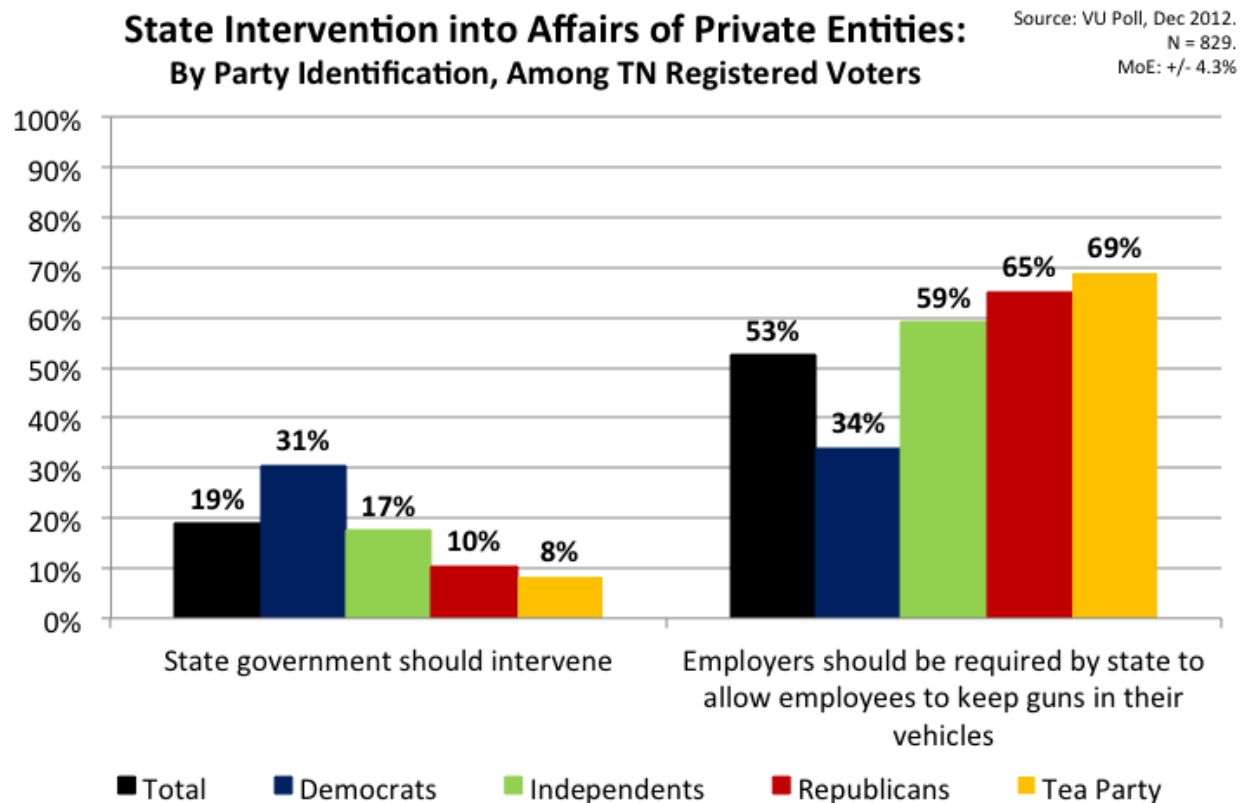


Another issue relates to the way that primary elections are conducted in the state of Tennessee. When asked whether the state should change the rules so that only officially registered party members are allowed to vote in their party's primary, or whether people should be able to choose which party's primary to participate in on Election Day, an overwhelming 85% of Tennesseans indicated that they support the current system of open primaries.

Regulation of Private Entities by the State Government:

Two questions were asked about the extent to which the state legislature ought to become involved in regulating the relationship between individuals and private entities.

When asked whether the state government should tell private entities, such as religious groups, private universities, and corporations, what their non-discrimination policies should be or should private entities be free to make their own policies, 70% of registered voters in Tennessee rejected the intervention of the state and only 19% of voters thought that the state should intervene. Democrats were the most supportive of state intervention (31%), with Republicans being less supportive (10%).



Another such issue is whether individuals with handgun carry permits should be allowed to keep guns in their vehicles while on their employer's private property. Among registered voters, 53% think that the state should require employers to allow their employees to keep a gun in their vehicle if they have the required permits, and 44% believe that employers should not be required by the state to allow this. A majority of Republicans (65%) and independents (59%) believe that the state should require private entities to comply, but only 34% of Democrats support it.