

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY POLL  
DECEMBER 2012

In January 2011, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions launched the Vanderbilt Poll, which surveys individuals 18 and older who are residents of the state of Tennessee. The goal was – and is – to provide a non-partisan and scientifically based reading of public opinion within the state. The Vanderbilt Poll is bi-annual, with surveys conducted prior to the start of the state legislative session and at its conclusion. There will be occasional surveys around important elections, such as the February 2012 Republican Presidential Primary Poll, but the focus is to measure accurately what Tennesseans think about important state and national issues and then make that information available to citizens, policy-makers, and scholars.

Vanderbilt University (VU) offers an ideal setting for sponsoring this poll. Not only is Vanderbilt located in the state capital, but it is a private institution that does not rely on funding from the state government. That gives us the flexibility to ask questions on controversial issues that may be facing the state. VU also has committed sufficient resources for us to employ state-of-the-art techniques in gathering the best possible data. Good polling is costly and cutting corners can lead to questionable data. Finally, CSDI and VU have extensive expertise among its faculty, students, and staff to make the poll a success.

Joshua Clinton, Associate Professor of Political Science, and John Geer, Professor of Political Science, have served as co-directors of the Vanderbilt Poll since its inception. Clinton received his Ph.D. from Stanford University, where he also earned an M.S. in Statistics and Economics. Geer received his Ph.D. from Princeton University, where he also earned an M.A. in Politics. Both have substantial experience in survey research, developing representative samples, drafting survey questions, and analyzing the resulting data.

We take our objective of providing an unbiased reading of public opinion very seriously. As a result, we conduct telephone interviews through both landlines and cell phones. We also weight all statistical results to ensure an accurate demographic representation.

To ensure the VU Poll identifies the most important issues facing the state and asks questions that avoid ideological bias, we appointed a bi-partisan Board of Advisors to provide guidance on the poll. Our Board evaluates the poll *prior* to it going in the field. We start by soliciting suggestions from the Board about what topics to include on the poll and make every effort to utilize those suggestions. Once we draft questions for the poll, we then secure reaction from the Board to the proposed questions. We then make further revisions to the questions based on those reactions. Current VU Poll board members are:

*Charles W. Bone*, attorney and chairman of Bone McAllester Norton PLLC

*Tom Ingram*, political strategist with The Ingram Group

*Roy M. Neel*, senior adviser to former Vice President Al Gore

*Bill Phillips*, government relations consultant and former Nashville deputy major

*Bill Purcell*, former Nashville mayor and counsel at Jones Hawkins & Farmer PLC

*Wayne Riley*, President of Meharry Medical College

*Anne Russell*, special counsel at Adams and Reese LLP

*Chip Saltsman*, chief of staff for Rep. Chuck Fleischmann