

**ELEVENTH VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY POLL**

May 2015

In January 2011, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (CSDI) launched the Vanderbilt Poll to survey adult residents of Tennessee aged 18 and older. 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. While the Poll occasionally conducts surveys around important elections (such as the February 2012 Republican presidential primary poll), its main focus is to uncover what Tennesseans think about important state and national issues and to make our findings available to citizens, policy-makers, and scholars. Since 2011, the Vanderbilt Poll has surveyed over 13,000 Tennesseans and all poll results are available at [www.vu.edu/poll](http://www.vu.edu/poll).

Vanderbilt University (VU) offers an ideal setting for polling state opinion. Not only is Vanderbilt located in Tennessee's state capital of Nashville, but it is also a private institution that does not rely on funding from the state government. This allows for 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 polling expertise among its faculty, students, and staff.

Joshua Clinton, Professor of Political Science, and John Geer, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt 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 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 achieve an accurate demographic representation. Beginning in May 2015, we began using a registered voter list to identify the sample of respondents. This allows us to gain better understanding about the opinions that state leaders hear and allows us to produce more reliable statistical estimates by eliminating the need to trim samples to exclude non-voters.

To help identify the most important issues facing the state and to ensure that our questions avoid ideological and partisan bias, a bi-partisan Board of Advisors provides guidance on each 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 write questions for the poll, we get the Board's reaction to our proposed questions and we then make further revisions 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 mayor

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

*Lisa Quigley*, Chief of Staff for Rep. Jim Cooper

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

*Chip Saltsman*, former chief of staff for Rep. Chuck Fleischmann and political strategist

*Jamie Woodson*, President and CEO of the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE)

In April 2015, the Vanderbilt Poll became a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative, which is dedicated to encouraging broader and more effective disclosure of research methods among survey organizations. Detailed information about the methodology of our polls can be found on our website at [www.vu.edu/poll](http://www.vu.edu/poll).