

*Millsaps College/Chism Strategies State of the State Survey
Summary of Findings: October 1, 2018*

- **Uptick in Optimism About Direction of the State.** A growing share of Mississippi voters believe that the state is heading in the right direction, a view held by 43% of the electorate as compared to 30% who say that the state is heading in the wrong direction. The 13% net right direction figure is a significant change from the -3% net wrong direction figure during the first State of the State Survey last September and the strongest net right direction rating measured in the first five surveys. The rather large change in the directional assessment provided by the voters in July and the one given now could be attributed to public support for the work done in the Special Session of the legislature, which occurred following the July State of the State Survey.

- **Partisan and Racial Divisions Over Direction of State.** Despite the more positive assessment about the state’s direction between July and September, divisions remain within the Mississippi electorate regarding the state’s general direction. For example, 57% of white voters say that the state his heading in the right direction while just 24% of black voters agree. Republicans are considerably more likely than Democrats to say that the state is heading in the right direction with 72% of Strong Republicans and 57% of Republican Leaners viewing the state’s direction in a positive light. Meanwhile, just 17% of Strong Democrats and 26% of Democratic Leaners would agree, as would 38% of Independents. Additionally, 54% of men say that the state is heading in the right direction as opposed to 43% of women.

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

Date of Poll	Right Direction	Wrong Direction	Unsure	Net Right/Wrong Direction
Sep-17	37%	40%	23%	-3%
Jan-18	42%	36%	22%	+6%
Apr-18	44%	37%	20%	+7%
Jul-18	35%	29%	37%	+6%
Sept-18	43%	30%	27%	+13%

- **Broad Support for the Lottery.** The Mississippi Legislature completed a Special Session on transportation called by Governor Phil Bryant in late August. One of the primary pieces of legislation produced by the Special Session was a bill creating a state lottery, bringing Mississippi into alignment with about 44 other states that already have a lottery on the books. The bulk of the funds raised by the eventual lottery will be directed towards repairing the state’s roads and bridges. This new law is extremely popular with the public, as nearly 70% of Mississippi voters support the creation of a state lottery with most of the funds being directed to infrastructure repair. Only 18% oppose the new measure.

Support for the lottery plan resonates with Mississippians across the board. Voters of all age ranges back the plan by wide margins, especially voters 18 to 34 (+75%), 35 to 44 (+54%), and 45 to 54 (+53%). Both white and black voters support the measure by nearly equal proportions at +50 and +49, respectively as do male (+58%) and female (+42%) voters as well as voters of all educational backgrounds. Support also cuts across the partisan divide with high levels of support among Strong Republicans (+49%), Republican Leaners (+60%), Strong Democrats (+44%), Democratic Leaners (+35%), and Independents (+48%).

- **Legislature Gets Better Marks After Special Session.** The September 2018 Millsaps College/Chism Strategies State of the State Survey is the fifth quarterly poll in which we asked Mississippi voters to determine whether they approve or disapprove of the work being done by the State Legislature. Just several weeks after the completion of the Special Session on transportation we find the highest overall approval rating to date for the legislative branch of state government at 32%. With that said, the State Legislature’s approval rating is still slightly underwater as 34% disapprove of them collectively for a net approve/disapprove rating of -2%. It must be noted, however, that this is a substantial improvement since the July State of the State Survey in which just 22% approved of the legislature’s work, marking a 10% increase in a short period of time which also corresponds with a bump in their net approve/disapprove rating from -12% to -2%.

Mississippi State Legislature Approval Rating

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approve/Disapprove
Sep-17	27%	45%	28%	-18%
Jan-18	26%	38%	36%	-12%
Apr-18	30%	41%	26%	-11%
Jul-18	22%	35%	43%	-12%
Sept-18	32%	34%	34%	-2%

There are some inconsistencies in how certain segments of the state’s electorate perceives the State Legislature. The legislative branch remains considerably more popular among voters 55 to 64 (+8%) and those 65 and older (+10%) than among those 18 to 34 (+4%), 35 to 44 (-20%), and 45 to 55 (-1%). There are also clear divisions along racial lines regarding legislative approval, as white voters are considerably more likely to approve of the legislature’s performance (+12%) than black voters in the state (-22%). Similarly, a sharp partisan divide is also apparent with Democrats and Independents tending to disapprove of the legislature’s efforts while Republicans like what they see from the legislative branch. Strong Democrats (-32%), Democratic Leaners (-35%), and Independents (-9%) are far less likely than Strong Republicans (+35%) and Republican Leaners (+15%) to approve of the legislature.

- **Voters Continue to Want More Funding for Infrastructure.** Despite strong support for the lottery law that emerged from the recent Special Session, an increasing optimism about the direction of the state, and gradually improving perceptions of the State Legislature as a whole, Mississippi voters also recognize that more funding and support from the state is likely needed for sufficient road, bridge, and general infrastructure upkeep. A study by the Mississippi Economic Council projected that the state likely needs \$375 million annually for required road and bridge repairs. Based on revenue projections, the new lottery is likely to generate about 20% of the funds needed after a year or two of operation¹. While a slight plurality of Mississippi voters (28%) are unsure about which option they would most like to turn to for additional funding, a quarter of respondents say that they favor repealing corporate tax breaks that have been enacted over the past several years by the legislature and governor. Another 14% favor increasing income taxes for higher wage earners, 14% also back building toll roads in some parts of the state, and 12% back raising the state gasoline tax, which has not been raised since 1989.² Just 7% favor bringing back a vehicle registration fee to pay for additional road and bridge upkeep.

Overall, Strong Democrats (38%), Democratic Leaners (37%), and Independents (30%) favor repealing the recent corporate tax breaks as their preferred mechanism for raising additional infrastructure revenue while Republicans are less united around a specific approach. 18% of Strong Republicans prefer building toll roads in some parts of the state as 18% of Republican Leaners would prefer raising the state gasoline tax instead. These figures show that the voting public recognizes that some actions have been taken to address the issue they continuously say is their top policy priority and have responded favorably to those initiatives. Still, many Mississippi voters are open to additional legislative efforts to provide funding for roads, bridges, and infrastructure repair in Mississippi.

- **Road and Bridge Repairs Top Priority for 6th Consecutive Quarterly Survey.** Mississippi voters continue to say that fixing the state's roads and bridges is their top policy priority for the fifth consecutive quarter. Despite the state's conservative political leanings, a combined 68% of respondents say that fixing roads and bridges, more funding for public schools, making healthcare more accessible and affordable, and more funding for universities and community colleges are their top priorities. 36% of male and 26% of female voters say that fixing the state's roads and bridges is their top policy priority, although women within the electorate were considerably more likely to say that making healthcare more accessible and affordable (21%) was a priority than their male counterparts (11%).

Repairing roads and bridges was also the top priority of the plurality of most voters when broken down by partisanship. 30% of Strong Republicans, 37% of Republican Leaners, 28% of Independents, and 30% of Strong Democrats all agreed that fixing roads and bridges was

¹ Harris, Bracey. "Senate passes lottery bill that would keep all records private from public review." *Clarion Ledger*, August 24, 2018. <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/politics/2018/08/23/mississippi-senate-approves-lottery/1074799002/>

² "How Long Has It Been Since Your State Raised Its Gas Tax?" Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, May 22, 2018. <https://itep.org/how-long-has-it-been-since-your-state-raised-its-gas-tax-0518/>

the most important issue for them in state politics while 28% of Democratic Leaners say that they want more funding for public schools. Support for fixing roads and bridges was also prevalent among both white and black voters, with 28% of black voters and 29% of white voters reporting that this was their top priority.

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

Policy Priority	17-Sep	18-Jan	18-Apr	18-Jul	18-Sep	12 Month Avg.
Reducing the size of state government	16%	11%	12%	8%	12%	12%
Fixing roads and bridges	27%	23%	29%	25%	27%	26%
Giving tax incentives and grants for companies that create jobs	13%	10%	9%	12%	8%	10%
Making healthcare more accessible and affordable	14%	21%	14%	18%	18%	17%
More funding for public schools	14%	19%	20%	22%	20%	19%
More funding for universities and community colleges	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Protecting traditional family values	6%	7%	11%	8%	8%	8%
Other	7%	6%	2%	4%	4%	5%

➤ **Bryant Approval Ratings Dip Slightly But Remain Strong.** The September Millsaps College/Chism Strategies State of the State Survey finds that Governor Phil Bryant remains a popular figure in the state. 50% of Mississippi voters approve of Governor Bryant while just 34% disapprove. The governor enjoys a particularly strong approval rating among those 65 and older (+33%), voters 55 to 64 (+24%), and voters 18 to 34 (+20%). He is also very popular among white voters (+50%), male voters (+29%), two-year college graduates (+48%), four-year college graduates (+36%), Strong Republicans (+78%), and Republican Leaners (+62%). Support for Bryant diminishes among certain segments of the electorate including Strong Democrats (-51%), Democratic Leaners (-45%), voters with advanced degrees (-5%), and black voters (-38%).

Governor Bryant has been assessed in three separate State of the State Surveys. Overall, his approval rating has remained considerably ahead of his disapproval rating. His net approval rating has gradually diminished over the course of the past year from a high of +21 in September 27 to +16 in the most recent survey of Mississippi voters.

Do you approve or disapprove of Governor Phil Bryant?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
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Sep-17	54%	33%	13%	+21%
Apr-18	54%	35%	11%	+19%
Sept-18	50%	34%	16%	+16%

- **Lt. Governor Continues to Trail Other State Leaders in Approval Ratings.** Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves remains a somewhat undefined figure despite years of exposure to Mississippi voters. Covered in three separate Millsaps College/Chism Strategies State of the State Surveys, Reeves has seen a consistent net approval rating between +4 and +6. The September 2018 survey finds that Reeves is popular among white voters (+26), voters 18 to 34 (+31%), two-year college graduates (+27%), those with less than a high school degree (+22%), Strong Republicans (+49%), and Republican Leaners (+24%). Reeves is considerably less popular among black voters (-29%), voters with an advanced degree (-26%), Strong Democrats (-41%), and Democratic Leaners (-37%).

Do you approve or disapprove of Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
Sep-17	38%	32%	29%	+6
Apr-18	38%	34%	27%	+4
Sept-18	37%	32%	31%	+5

- **Attorney General Remains State’s Most Popular Elected Official.** Jim Hood enjoys broad support from various segments of the Mississippi electorate and has the highest overall net approval rating among any elected officials analyzed in the September State of the State Survey at +23%. Mississippi voters appear to be largely divided when it comes to questions of politics and policy but are generally united in approving of Hood. The sitting Attorney General finds approval among female voters (+30%), male voters (+19%), black voters (+26%), white voters (+21%), those with less than a high school degree (+50%), those with advanced degrees (+36%), high school graduates (+26%), four year graduates (+23%), Democratic Leaners (+53%), Strong Democrats (+29%), Independents (+28%), Republican Leaners (+21%), and Strong Republicans (+15%).

Do you approve or disapprove of Attorney General Jim Hood?

Date of Poll	Approve	Disapprove	Unsure	Net Approval
Sep-17	52%	25%	22%	+27%
Apr-18	55%	25%	17%	+30%
Sept-18	50%	27%	24%	+23%

➤ **New State Auditor Still Not Widely Known.** Shad White was appointed to the position of State Auditor, effective July 17, 2018. Despite having never sought public office as a candidate, White currently has an approval rating of 27% compared to 15% who disapprove of him. Meanwhile, 58% are unsure of his work as State Auditor. Although he is far less known than state officials like Governor Bryant, Lieutenant Governor Reeves, and Attorney General Hood, White has a +11% rating among women, +17% among men, +28% among those with less than a high school degree, +19% among two-year graduates, +15% among four-year graduates, and +11% among those with advanced degrees. White is also well-liked among Strong Republicans (+36%), and Republican Leaners (+15%). Conversely, Strong Democrats who recognize White largely disapprove of his performance thus far (-15%). It is possible that the relatively high levels of approval for White among certain segments of the electorate can be attributed to news media coverage of several high-profile audits performed on his watch in the early days of his administration.

➤ **Likely Democratic Nominee for Lt. Governor Posts Big Gains in Net Approval Ratings.** State Representative Jay Hughes was perhaps the first candidate to formally declare that he is seeking higher office in 2019. As a candidate for Lieutenant Governor and a member of the legislature, 26% of voters approve of Hughes while 16% disapprove. A majority of 58% were unsure and could not make a determination about him, indicating that Hughes still has work to gain name recognition. These numbers reflect an improvement for Hughes who had a 19% approval and 20% disapproval rating in the April 2018 State of the State Survey.

Interestingly, Hughes—who is a Democrat—has a higher approval rating among Republicans (+21% among Strong Republicans, +11% among Republican Leaners) than among members of his own party (-3% among Strong Democrats, +3% among Democratic Leaners). Hughes also performs better among white voters (+16%) than among black voters (-3%). Younger voters also view Hughes more favorably than older voters where he has a net approval rating of +24% among those 18 to 34, +16% among voters 35 to 44, and +11% among voters 45 to 54. Meanwhile, Hughes' net approval rating among those 55 to 64 is -1% and +8% among those 65 and older.

➤ **President Trump Remains a Divisive Figure Among MS Voters.** The President's approval rating in Mississippi remains largely unchanged from April 2018. 51% of Mississippi voters say that they approve of Trump, 43% disapprove, and 6% are unsure of how they feel. Comparatively, his April approval rating also stood at 51% while 45% disapproved of his presidency and 4% were unsure at that time.

Trump's current net +8% approval figure can be attributed to steadfast support among Strong Republicans (+92%), those who Lean Republican (+68%), white voters (+54%), male voters (+33%), voters 65 and older (+29%), two-year college graduates (+31%), four-year graduates (+28%), those who attended college but did not graduate (+25%), and high school graduates (+25%). Mirroring national trends, Trump runs into problems among Strong Democrats (-79%), Democratic Leaners (-77%), black voters (-65%), Independents (-10%), those with advanced degrees (-16%). Trump also holds a +6% rating among women voters in Mississippi, with whom his overall approval rating is under 50%.

- **Mississippians Mildly Enthusiastic About Historic Midterm Elections.** National turnout in 2014 stood at 36.4%, the lowest turnout rate for midterm elections since 1942. Meanwhile, turnout was even worse in Mississippi, as just 29.7% of voters participated in the midterm elections that year, the sixth lowest among all states.³ The State of the State Survey finds that Mississippi voters are only mildly enthusiastic about the midterm elections, which occur on November 6, 2018. Overall, 50% of voters report that they are extremely or very enthusiastic about voting this fall while 43% are only somewhat enthusiastic or not enthusiastic at all. Pockets of enthusiasm—those saying they are extremely or very enthusiastic about voting in November—exist among white voters (56%), men (61%), and the strongest partisans in the electorate (63% among Strong Republicans and 52% among Strong Democrats). Meanwhile, voter enthusiasm is lagging in some segments of the electorate as just 43% of black voters, 40% of Republican Leanners, 41% of Democratic Leanners, and 45% of Independents appear enthusiastic about the upcoming elections.

These findings tell us that the most partisan voters—who also happen to be the most politically engaged from the standpoint of voting—are excited to cast their ballots this fall. While the more partisan voters sense that they have a reason to be enthused about the November 6 elections, it is possible that the rest of the state’s electorate haven’t found a particular candidate that has sparked their enthusiasm, haven’t tuned into the elections as of yet, or perhaps believe that Mississippi’s races aren’t pivotal ones that will help determine control of Congress come January 2019.

- **Voters Want More Collaboration and Compromise.** When asked about their preferred approach to governing, Mississippi voters report that they want their elected leaders to come together to accomplish things on behalf of the public. A solid majority of 64% say that they would prefer that their political leaders to compromise and get things done while just 22% prefer for those in office to stick to their beliefs, even if little gets done. Support for political compromise as opposed to sticking to beliefs at all costs cuts across all segments of the electorate including education level, gender, race, age groupings, and region. The strongest support for political compromise is found among older voters (+50), black voters (+53), and those with advance degrees (+55).
- **Electorate Perceives Erosion in Political Civility.** Mississippi voters believe that the overall level of civility in national politics has gotten worse in recent years, but they tend not to think that things are as bad within Mississippi politics. 62% say that the civility level in national politics has gotten worse recently compared to 39% who say the same about Mississippi politics. Meanwhile, 20% say that the level of civility in national politics has largely stayed about the same compared to 39% who feel the same way about politics here in the Magnolia State. Just 11% believe that the civility in national politics is getting better compared to 14% who say that it is improving in Mississippi politics.

The State of the State Survey finds that most voters of all races, gender, age groups, party affiliations, and educational attainment levels agree that civility in national politics is worsening (the only exception being those with less than a high school education who tend to

³ “2014 midterm election turnout lowest in 40 years.” PBS News Hour, November 10, 2014. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/2014-midterm-election-turnout-lowest-in-70-years>

say that things are staying about the same). Meanwhile, differences exist when considering the tone and civility in Mississippi politics. Voters who identify as Strong Democrats and Independents are much more likely to say that the level of civility in Mississippi politics is getting worse while Strong Republicans, Republican Leaners, and Democratic Leaners are more likely to say that things are staying about the same.

➤ **Mississippians Divided on Government’s Ability to Solve Problems.** Although Mississippians appear to agree on the need for political compromise and sense that the level of civility is deteriorating in national politics, they remain divided as to which level of government is most capable and trustworthy for solving problems. 28% of Mississippi voters say that local government is the most capable and trustworthy, 28% say the same of state government, 19% feel that the federal government is most capable and trustworthy, and 25% are unsure. As indicated in the table below, Mississippians of different backgrounds were likely to suggest that certain levels of government are more capable and trustworthy.

Which level of government do you believe is the most capable and trustworthy for solving problems? [Broken down by most popular answer choice]

Local Government (28%)	State Government (28%)	Federal Government (19%)
-Male voters (33%)	-White voters (37%)	-Black voters (28%)
-High school graduates (28%)	-Female voters (29%)	-Those with than a high school education (21%)
-Attended college but did not graduate (27%)	-Graduates from a two-year college (41%)	-Strong Democrats (29%)
-Those with advanced degree (36%)	-Graduates from a four-year college (37%)	
-Independents (36%)	-Strong Republicans (41%)	
-Democratic Leaners (26%)	-Republican Leaners (41%)	