



February 5, 2024

**TO:** Emily Eichenthal, Forward Tennessee  
**FROM:** Jessica Mason, Embold Research  
**RE:** Tennessee Survey Results

On behalf of Forward Tennessee, Embold Research surveyed 866 registered voters in Tennessee, in order to gauge voter perceptions on the current state of American democracy, events surrounding the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections, and other key political and policy issues in Tennessee. This research uncovered a deeply partisan state, with perceptions surrounding national politics falling strongly on partisan lines. At the same time, this research found key areas of bi-partisan unity, particularly regarding upcoming Tennessee legislation.

Additionally, this survey, in combination with previous surveys conducted in April 2023 and April 2022, also found that Tennessee voters have held relatively steady in their perceptions of the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election results, the events of January 6th, 2021, and the general direction of local, state, and national government.

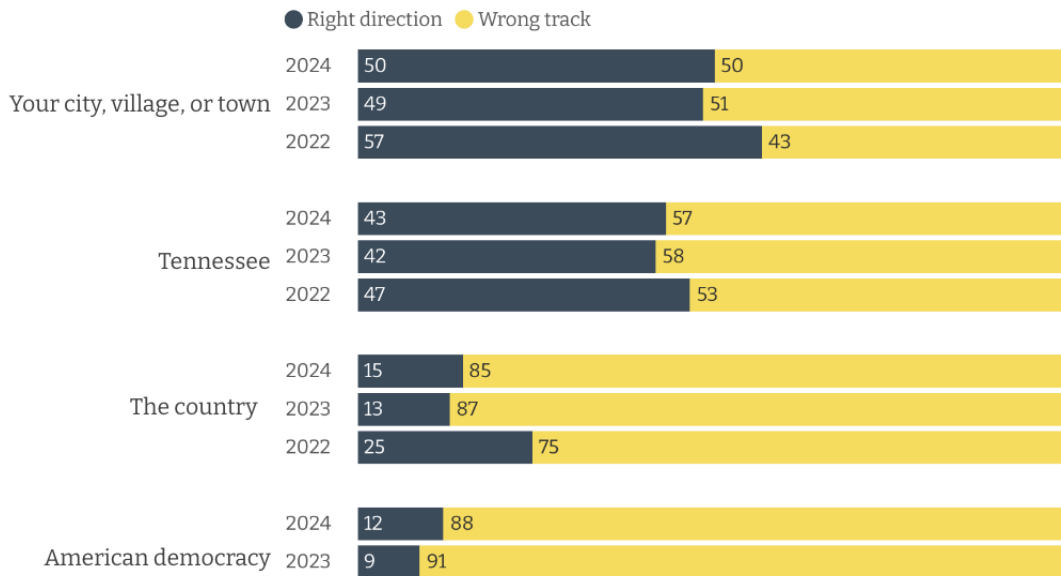
## State of Democracy

**Majorities of Tennessee voters believe that things are off on the wrong track at the national and state level.** Currently, 85% of voters believe that the country is off on the wrong track, and 57% believe the same for Tennessee. Voters are split when it comes to the direction of their local communities, with 50% believing that their city, village, or town are on the wrong track. Voters held a similarly negative outlook in April of 2022, where similar-sized majorities of voters said that the country, Tennessee, and their village, city or town were off on the wrong track. There exist some partisan divides in these perceptions of the region. While majorities of Democrats (65%), Independents (85%), and Republicans (97%) believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction, Republicans are much more optimistic about the direction of the state (66% right track), and their local communities (60% right track), compared to their Democratic and Independent counterparts.

**Voters are particularly concerned about the direction of American democracy: 88% say that American democracy is on the wrong track.** This marks a slight dip in concern in

comparison to April 2023, in which 91% of voters believed American democracy to be on the wrong track, however, voter concerns are still markedly high. Additionally, this is a broadly held belief across partisan lines: 96% of Republicans, 91% of Independents, and 72% of Democrats believe that American democracy is on the wrong track.

### Direction of the Region

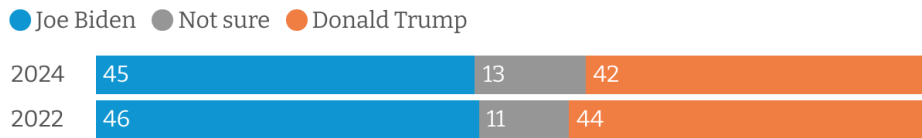


Q: How would you say things in the following areas are going? Are they going in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

### 2020 Presidential Election and January 6th

**Voters are roughly split on who they believe won the 2020 presidential election:** 45% of Tennessee voters believe Joe Biden won the election, while 42% believe Donald Trump won, and 13% are unsure. This divide in opinion is similar to that witnessed in April 2022, where 46% said they thought Biden won the 2020 election, while 44% said they thought Trump won. The question of who won the presidential election is a heavily polarizing one: 95% of Democrats believe Joe Biden to be the rightful winner, compared to 50% of Independents and just 13% of Republicans. Additionally, nearly one in five (18%) of Independent voters say they are not sure who won the presidential election.

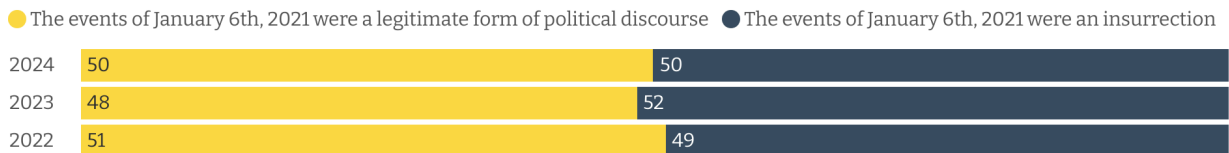
## Perceived 2020 Election Winner



Q: Regardless of who you voted for, who do you think won the 2020 presidential election?

**Voters remain split on their perceptions of January 6th, 2021, with half of Tennessee voters viewing the events of January 6th as an insurrection and half believing the events were a form of legitimate political discourse.** This divided opinion has remained virtually unchanged in the past two years, with 52% of voters reporting that they viewed January 6th as an insurrection in April 2023, and 49% saying the same in April 2022. Moreover, the perception of January 6th is split by party identification. Nearly all (95%) of Democrats believe that the events of January 6th were an insurrection, while the majority of Independents (61%) and most Republicans (80%) believe January 6th to be a form of legitimate political discourse.

## Perceptions of January 6th



Q: Which of the following comes closest to your views on the events of January 6th, 2021, even if neither is exactly right? \*As a reminder, on January 6th, protestors attacked the US Capitol building in an attempt to prevent the certification of the 2020 Presidential Election results.

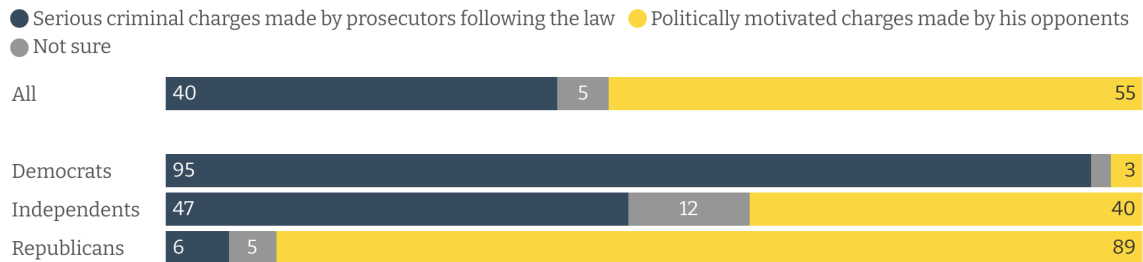
\*Added in 2023

## Perception of Trump Indictments

**A majority of Tennessee voters believe that Former President Trump's numerous indictments are politically motivated.** Just over half (55%) believe that the indictments Trump is currently facing are politically motivated charges made by his opponents, while 40% believe that they are serious criminal charges made by prosecutors following the law, and 5% are unsure. The perceptions of Trump's indictments fall on partisan lines, with an overwhelming majority of Democrats (95%) believing that the indictments are serious

criminal charges, in comparison to just under half of Independents (47%) and only 6% of Republicans.

## Perceptions of Trump Indictments

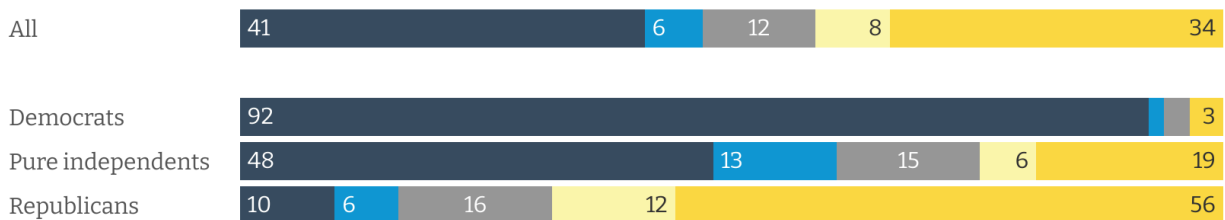


Q: Do you think the numerous indictments President Trump is facing are:

**At the same time, a significant portion of voters would be less likely to vote for Trump in 2024 if he is convicted of a felony by a jury of his peers.** If Trump is to be convicted, 47% of voters say they would be less likely to vote for him in the 2024 presidential election, while 41% would be more likely to vote for him, and 11% are unsure. Notably, for Republicans, a Trump conviction is a strong motivator to support him, rather than a deterrent: nearly seven in 10 (68%) Republican voters say that they would be more likely to vote for Trump if he is convicted of a felony, with 56% saying they would be “much more likely” to vote for him. In contrast, an overwhelming majority (94%) of Democrats say they would be less likely to vote for Trump if he is convicted of a felony.

## Impact of Indictments on 2024 Vote

Legend: Much less likely to vote for him (dark blue), Somewhat less likely to vote for him (light blue), Somewhat more likely to vote for him (light yellow), Much more likely to vote for him (yellow), Not sure (grey)



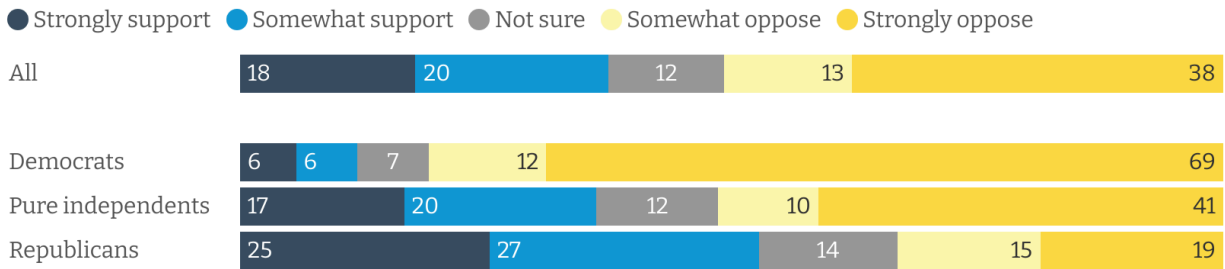
Q: If President Trump is convicted of a felony by a jury of his peers, would it make you more or less likely to vote for him for president in 2024?

## Key Policy Issues in Tennessee

**Half of Tennessee voters oppose Governor Bill Lee’s Education Freedom Scholarship Act.**

Fifty-one percent of voters say they oppose the act, with 38% saying that they strongly oppose it. In comparison, 38% of voters support the act, and 12% are unsure. Support for the bill falls on partisan lines: 81% of Democrats oppose the Education Freedom Scholarship Act, while 51% of Independent voters, and just a third of Republicans feel the same.

**Education Freedom Scholarship Act**

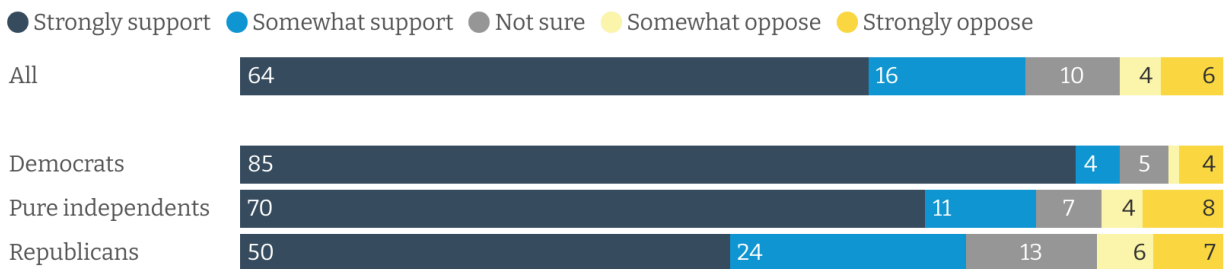


Q: As you may or may not know, in November of this past year, Governor Bill Lee proposed the Education Freedom Scholarship Act in order to establish state-wide school choice. Under this proposal, public tax dollars would be used to cover tuition costs at private schools, which are not required to serve all students. Do you support or oppose the Education Freedom Scholarship Act?

**In contrast, voters express strong, bipartisan support for the Contraceptive Freedom Act.**

When asked if they support or oppose the proposed Contraceptive Freedom Act, 80% of Tennessee voters say that they support it, including 64% who say they “strongly support” it, while 11% say they oppose it, and 10% are unsure. Support for the proposed act is strong across the political spectrum, 89% of Democrats, 81% of independents, and 74% of Republicans support it.

**Contraceptive Freedom Act**

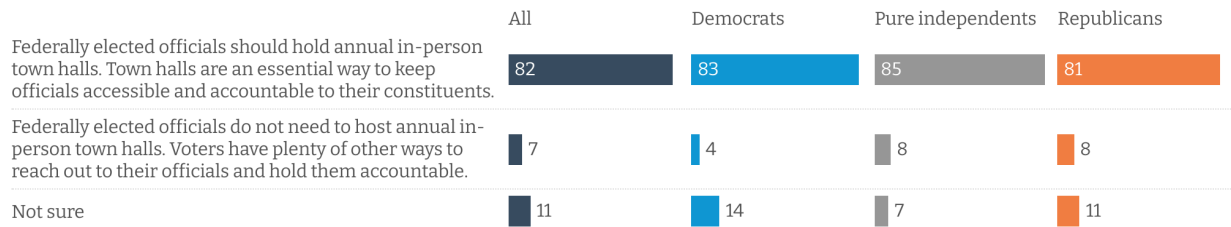


Q: Tennessee lawmakers are proposing the Contraceptive Freedom Act, which is a bill that would protect the right to access contraceptives, such as birth control pills, condoms and IUDs. Do you support or oppose the Contraceptive Freedom Act?

**Voters overwhelmingly support annual in-person town halls for federally elected officials.**

Just over eight in 10 (82%) of voters agree with the statement, “Federally elected officials should hold annual in-person town halls. Town halls are an essential way to keep officials accessible and accountable to their constituents.” In contrast, just 7% of voters say they more closely align with the statement, “Federally elected officials do not need to host annual in-person town halls. Voters have plenty of other ways to reach out to their officials and hold them accountable,” and 11% are unsure where they most align. Perceptions about town halls showcase a moment of political unity, rather than polarization: near equal majorities of Democrats (83%), Independents (85%), and Republicans (81%) alike affirm the importance of in-person, annual town hall meetings from elected officials.

**Perception of Annual In-person Town Halls**



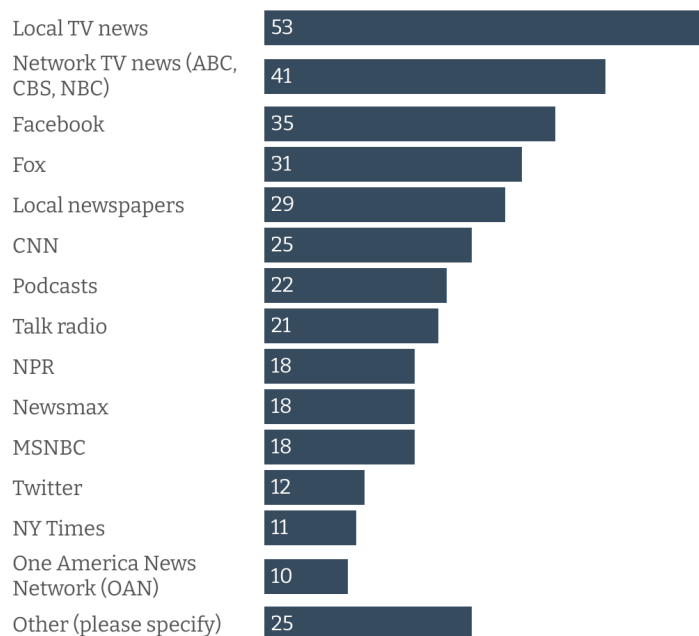
Q: Which of the following best describes your views:

**News Consumption**

**Tennessee voters get their news from a wide variety of sources.**

Just over half of voters (53%) rely on local TV networks for their news, and significant portions of voters also turn to network TV news (41%), Facebook (35%), and Fox News (31%). Voters are least likely to turn to Twitter (12%), the New York Times (11%) and One America News Network (10%) for their news. Additionally, a quarter of Tennessee voters say they seek their news from other sources outside of mainstream outlets and social media platforms, most commonly citing international news sources like BBC or Reuters,

**Top News Sources**



Q: Where do you get your news? Choose all that apply.

or other social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube.

**There exists a notable partisan divide when it comes to where Tennessee voters get their news.** Outside of local TV news – which significant portions of voters, regardless of political affiliation, regularly access – Democrats are most likely to turn to network TV news (58%) and CNN (45%). Significant portions of Democrats also get their news from MSNBC (36%), NPR (36%), and local newspapers (36%) at much higher rates than Republicans. In contrast, Republicans are most likely to get their news from Fox News (47%) and Facebook (39%). Meanwhile, Independent voters are most likely to get their news from network TV news (42%) and local newspapers (36%)

## Conclusion

This research reveals a state embedded in a fraught and divided political environment. Tennessee voters continue to have a deeply pessimistic outlook on the direction of their communities, their state, the country, and American democracy. Moreover, polarization remains strong: Democrats and Republicans maintain their opposing views on the true winner of the 2020 presidential election and on the events of January 6th, 2021. Additionally, this partisan lens informs how voters approach current events surrounding the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

Within this landscape of pessimism and polarization, there are some glimmers of hope. In a moment of bipartisan unity, Tennessee voters display overwhelming support for both the Contraceptive Freedom Act and the practice of elected officials hosting annual, in-person town halls.