



Institute of Public Policy
Truman Policy Research
Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs

June/2009

What Missouri Thinks: An Examination of Public Attitudes

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Political observers often refer to Missouri as a “bellwether” state, suggesting that the political and social attitudes of Missourians tend to reflect those of the rest of the United States. (Robertson, 2004). To better understand the opinions of Missourians on a set of important political, economic, and social issues, researchers at the Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs examined results from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES).¹ This nationally-representative public opinion survey included a sample of 817 Missouri residents.²

In this report, we explore the attitudes of Missourians to examine how they differ from the rest of the nation and how they vary within the state. Given the demographic patterns of Missouri, we are particularly interested in potential differences in attitudes between residents living in urban and rural areas (see Appendix A for additional discussion.) Overall, we find that Missouri residents shared similar attitudes on major economic, social and military issues with the rest of the nation, but we also find that rural and urban Missourians held distinctly different opinions on these same issues. These differences in opinion are likely driven by factors such as partisan identification,

political ideology, education, and other socioeconomic attributes.³

Attitudes of Missourians and the Rest of the Nation

Survey respondents were asked about the most important issues facing the country. Table 1 presents the responses for the top three issues facing the Nation, Missourians, urban Missourians, and rural Missourians. According to Missouri residents, the top three issues were the economy (54%), corruption of government (12%), and moral values (6%). The economy was overwhelmingly the most important issue facing Americans. The percent of Missouri residents believing the economy to be the most important problem facing the country is slightly below the national average of 57%. Both rural and urban Missourians expressed the economy as their biggest concern, but rural Missourians (48%) were slightly less concerned about the economy than urban Missourians (58%). Also, Americans identified government corruption as the second most important issue facing the nation. Rural Missourians were more concerned about corruption in government and moral values than urban Missourians.

1. The Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) consists of questions to evaluate public opinion on Congress and other national policy issues. This survey is a collaborative effort of researchers from over 30 universities. This 2008 survey polled 32,800 U.S. residents. The survey is administered over the Internet by the online survey firm, YouGov/Polimetrix. The Pre-Election survey was given in the first two weeks of October 2008, and the Post-Election survey was given over the two-week period following the General Election in 2008. The sampling method uses a matched random sample methodology. This ensures a representative sample from a non-randomly selected group.

2. To evaluate if the sample of Missouri respondents reflected that of the state, we examined demographic variables such as gender, race, education, and age. We compared the averages from the sample with averages from the 2000 U.S. Census. Generally, we found that the CCES respondents were representative of the state across the variables, although African-Americans and Hispanics were slightly under-represented in the CCES sample. In particular, the CCES had 6.7% African-American respondents from Missouri, while the U.S. Census estimate for Missouri is 11.5%. The CCES had 1.6% Hispanic respondents from Missouri, while the U.S. Census estimate for Missouri is 3%. We did not reweight the sample. Refer to the Appendix for a summary of demographic variables in urban and rural Missouri.

3. We analyzed all the responses to each of the survey questions in a logistic regression (support coded 1, oppose coded 0) model containing the variables age, education, gender, urban or rural, income, minority, seven-point political party, and political ideology. When controlling for all these individual-level attributes, the urban or rural variable was often not statistically significant. For this reason, the differences discussed here between the opinions of Missourians in rural and urban areas are likely explained by the sorting of different types of individuals in these areas.

Table 1. The Top Three Most Important Issues Facing the Nation.

	Most Important Issue	2nd Most Important Issue	3rd Most Important Issue
National	Economy 57%	Corruption in Government 10%	Rising Prices (Inflation) 6%
Missouri	Economy 54%	Corruption in Government 12%	Moral Values 6%
Urban	Economy 58%	Corruption in Government 10%	Health Care/Terrorism 5%
Rural	Economy 48%	Corruption in Government 15%	Moral Values 7%

Economy and Jobs

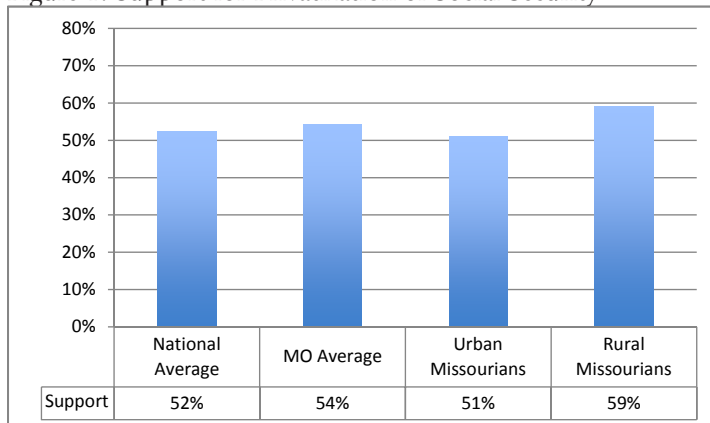
The economy was identified as the most important issue facing both Missourians and the rest of the nation. We analyze four major economic issues asked about on the 2008 CCES survey: privatizing social security, increasing the minimum wage, the banking bailout, and a carbon tax.

1) Privatize Social Security

Approximately 50 million people received social security benefits in 2007 (Social Security Trustees, 2008). These social security payments totaled to \$585 billion. Nearly 19% of Missouri residents receive social security benefits, which is slightly higher than the national average of 16% (AARP, 2008). As a whole, the state of Missouri received \$12 billion in social security benefits in 2006. Sixty percent of Missourians age sixty-five and older, rely on social security payments for more than half of their income. The Social Security Administration has estimated that expenses will exceed revenue by 2017, thereby exhausting the reserve fund by 2041 (Social Security Trustee, 2008).

Some reformers have proposed privatizing social security as a means to stabilize the fund, but this issue has been controversial. A slight majority of Missourians supported privatizing social security (i.e., 54%), compared to 52% for the rest of the nation (see Figure 1). Urban Missourians were less likely to support privatizing social security compared to rural Missourians. Fifty-nine percent of rural Missourians supported privatizing social security compared to 51% of urban Missourians.

Figure 1. Support for Privatization of Social Security

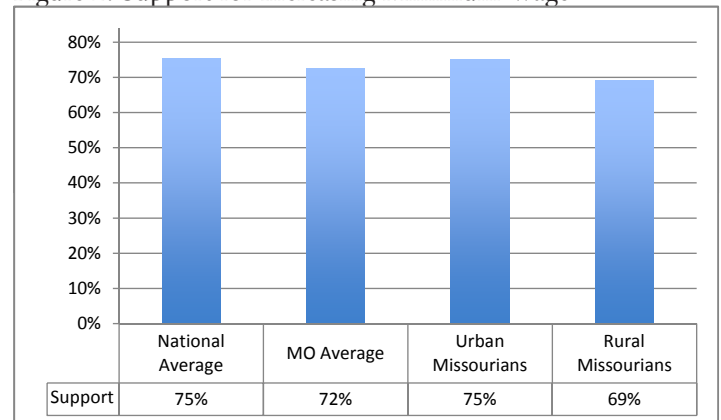


2) Increase Minimum Wage

In November 2006, Missouri residents voted on a ballot measure to increase the minimum wage. Missouri is one of 27 states that have a higher minimum wage than the federal government requirement (DOL, 2009). Currently, the state of Missouri requires employers to have a minimum wage of \$7.05 per hour, while the Federal government requires \$6.55 per hour. The minimum wage in Missouri is also adjusted each year to account for inflation (MO DOLIR, 2009).

Increasing the minimum wage is a fairly popular policy at the state and national level. Seventy-two percent of Missourians supported increasing the minimum wage, which was similar to a 75% level of support for the rest of the nation (see Figure 2). Urban Missourians were more likely to support an increase in minimum wage than rural Missourians. Seventy-five percent of urban Missourians supported an increase in minimum wage compared to 69% of rural Missourians.

Figure 2. Support for Increasing Minimum Wage



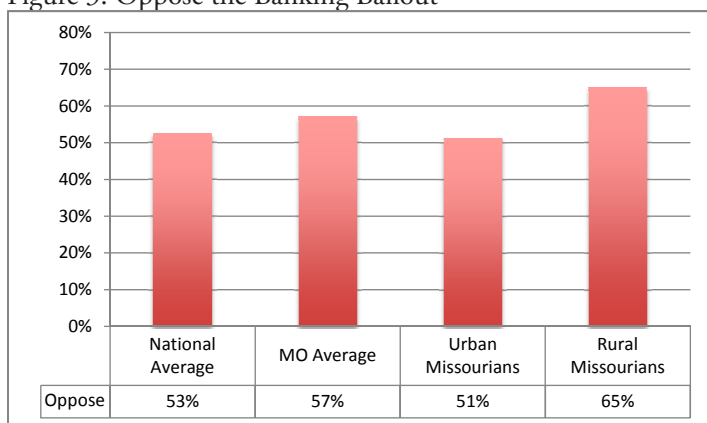
3) Bank Bailout

During the fall of 2008, the U.S. banking industry was reporting record losses from mortgage-backed securities (Fineman & Keoun, 2008). In September of 2008, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, and Merrill Lynch was sold to Bank of America. The U.S. Federal Reserve provided emergency funding to American International Group (AIG), thereby allowing AIG to avoid bankruptcy (Andrews, de la Merced, & Walsh, 2008). In October 2008, President Bush signed the Emergency Economic

Stabilization Act as a means to stabilize the financial sector by bailing out failing banks (Bloomberg, 2008).

The banking bailout was hotly debated by the presidential candidates, and became one of the major issues during the November election. Missourians were marginally more opposed to the bank bailout than the rest of the U.S public. Fifty-seven percent of Missouri residents opposed the bailout compared to 53% of the rest of the nation (see Figure 3). There was also considerable difference in the attitudes of rural and urban Missourians regarding the bailout. Sixty-five percent of rural Missourians opposed the bank bailout compared to 51% of urban Missourians.

Figure 3. Oppose the Banking Bailout

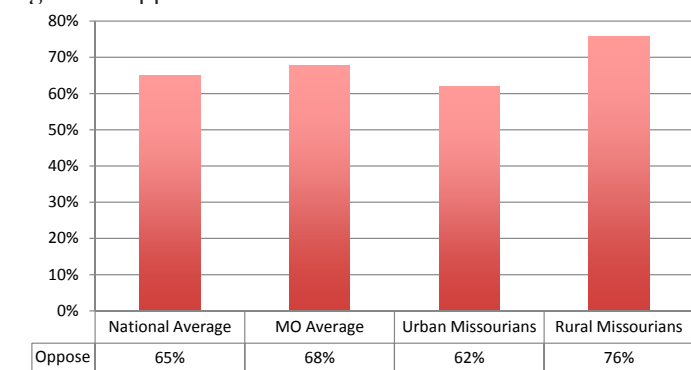


4) Carbon Tax

A carbon tax levies a charge on emissions of carbon dioxide, and is often put forward as a policy to address climate change. A carbon tax is also viewed as a method of fostering the development of alternative energy, and some suggest that it would be simpler to implement than the cap-and-trade system supported by President Obama (Broder, 2009).

A carbon tax is not popular. Sixty-eight percent of Missourians were opposed to a carbon tax, which was slightly higher than the national average of 65% (See Figure 4). Rural Missourians were more likely to oppose a carbon tax (76%) compared to urban Missourians (62%). Also, more urban Missourians were unsure if they supported or opposed the carbon tax (i.e., 22%) compared to rural Missourians (15%).

Figure 4. Oppose a Carbon Tax



Social Issues

We examined three major social issues: stem cell research, gay marriage, and guaranteeing health insurance. Missourians had very similar attitudes on stem cell research and guaranteeing health insurance with the rest of the nation. However, Missourians were slightly more supportive of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage compared to the national average. Rural and urban Missourians were divided on these three social issues, with margins of nearly 20% for each issue.

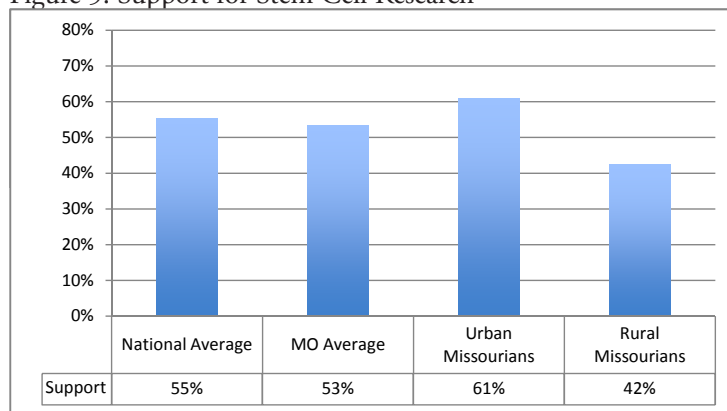
1) Stem Cell Research

In November 2006, Missouri voters approved a constitutional amendment that protected stem cell research in the state. The stem cell initiative narrowly passed with 51% of voters approving the constitutional amendment (Secretary of State, 2008).

Even though the amendment received support from voters, the expected expansion of stem cell research in Missouri has run into both political and financial roadblocks. For example, the Stowers Institute of Medical Research has suspended their plans for a \$300 million expansion of their facilities because of a persistently negative political climate (Davey, 2007).

In the 2008 CCES, a slight majority of Missourians (53%) was supportive of stem cell research, which is close to the national average (see Figure 5). However, rural and urban Missourians held different preferences on this issue. Although sixty-one percent of urban Missourians support stem cell research, it was supported by less than a majority of rural Missourians (43%).

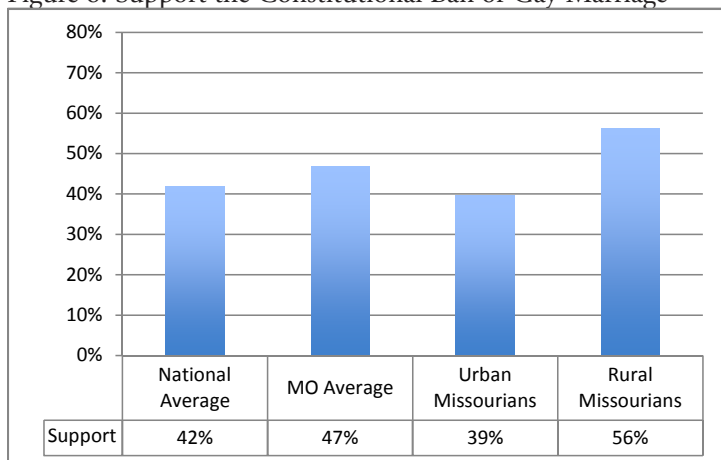
Figure 5. Support for Stem Cell Research



2) Gay Marriage

In August 2004, Missouri voters approved a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Nearly 70% of Missouri residents voted for the constitutional amendment to redefine the definition of marriage, thereby effectively banning gay marriage in the state (Secretary of State, 2008). In the 2008 CCES, 47% of Missourians supported a gay marriage ban compared to a national average of 42% (see Figure 6). As was the case for stem cell research above, urban and rural Missourians have significantly different views on gay marriage. Fifty-six percent of rural Missourians supported a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage compared to only 39% of urban Missourians.

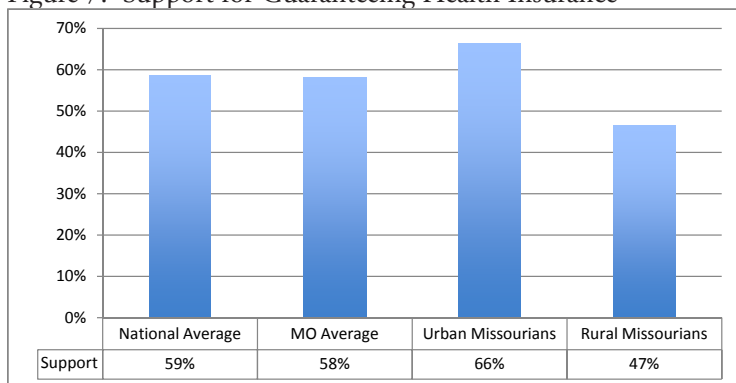
Figure 6. Support the Constitutional Ban of Gay Marriage



3) Guaranteeing Health Insurance

To examine Americans’ attitudes on health care, respondents in the survey were asked whether they favored the U.S. government guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes? As a whole, 58% of Missourians were supportive of guaranteed health care, which was about the same level of support expressed by the U.S. public as whole (see Figure 7). However, urban residents in Missouri tended to be more supportive of guaranteed health care than those residing in rural areas. Sixty-six percent of urban Missourians supported required health care for all citizens compared to only 47% of rural Missourians.

Figure 7. Support for Guaranteeing Health Insurance



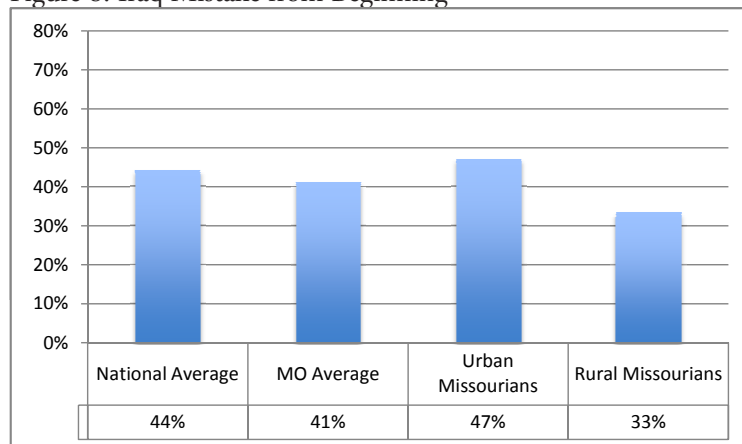
Military

Finally, we analyzed the attitudes of Missourians on issues pertaining to military action. On the Iraq War, 41% of the Missourians responding to the 2008 CCES believed that Iraq was a mistake from the beginning, while the national average was 44% (see Figure 8). While Missourians’ opinions on the Iraq War were consistent with those of the rest of the nation, attitudes within the state of Missouri were quite different. Forty-seven percent of urban Missourians believed that Iraq was a mistake from the beginning compared to just 33% of rural Missourians. Twenty-two percent of Missouri residents expressed the view that the war was the right action despite

the mistakes, which was consistent with the national average. Twenty-eight percent of rural Missourians believed the Iraq War was the right action despite the mistakes compared to 18% of urban Missourians.

Rural and urban Missourians also have different attitudes about military use in general. Rural Missourians were significantly more likely to support the use of the military to spread democracy (28%) compared to urban Missourians (20%). In addition, urban Missourians were significantly more likely to support the use of the military to intervene genocide or civil war (53%) compared to rural Missourians (45%).

Figure 8. Iraq Mistake from Beginning



Conclusion

This report compared the attitudes and policy preferences of Missourians with that of the rest of the United States on several economic, social, and military issues. As a whole, the attitudes of Missouri residents as expressed by respondents to the 2008 CCES survey were in line with those of the rest of the nation. Opinions of Missourians at the state level, however, disguise a significant rural and urban divide. Rural Missourians expressed more support than did residents in urban areas for issues ranging from the Iraq war to privatizing social security to banning stem cell research. Urban Missourians, on the other hand, were more likely to support increases in minimum wage and gay marriage in the state. Further analysis at the individual-level is necessary to better understand the sources of this division of opinion between Missourians living in urban and rural areas of the state.

Appendix

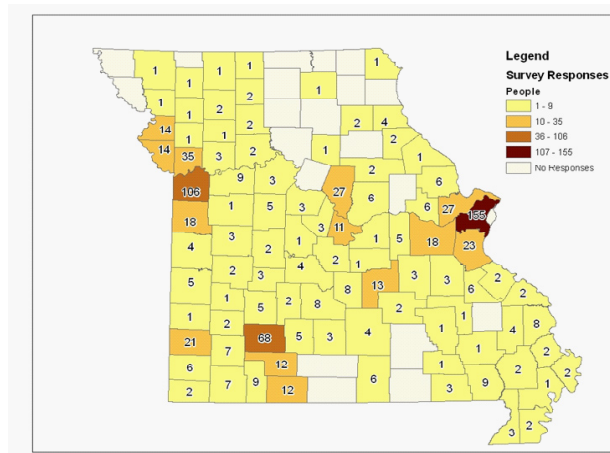
In this analysis, we classified urban and rural counties in Missouri by using the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) county cutoff. Urban counties were classified as having a population over 100,000 residents. Urban counties in Missouri are Boone, Clay, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, St. Louis (County and City), and St. Charles.

Table A.1. provides demographic characteristics of urban and rural Missourians. We used the CCES dataset to calculate these percentages. Figure A.1. provides the number of respondents in each Missouri county.

Table A.1. Demographic Characteristics of Urban and Rural Missourians

	Urban	Rural
Education		
No High School	3.46%	5.35%
High School	29.22%	47.61%
Some College	23.38%	21.13%
2- Year	8.44%	6.76%
4- Year	25.54%	14.37%
Post-Grad	9.96%	4.79%
Gender		
Male	49.78%	51.83%
Female	50.22%	48.17%
Race		
White	82.47%	92.39%
Black	10.82%	1.13%
Hispanic	1.95%	1.97%
Asian	1.08%	0.28%
Native American	1.08%	1.97%
Mixed	1.3%	0.85%
Others	1.3%	1.41%
Political Orientation		
Party		
Democrat	45.03%	31.36%
Republican	21.47%	33.10%
Independent	26.70%	26.83%
Other	3.40%	4.53%
Not Sure	3.40%	4.18%

Figure A.1. Number of Respondents in each Missouri County



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Suggested Citation

Konisky, D., & Harrington, J.R. (2009). "What Missouri Thinks: An Examination of Public Attitudes" Report 08-2009. Retrieved [Month Day, Year], from University of Missouri Columbia, Institute of Public Policy Web site: <http://www.truman.missouri.edu/ipp/>

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