



# THE TENNESSEE POLL

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## **Tennesseans generally support access to reproductive, abortion care services for women**

***Tennessee Poll finds opinions differ across demographic groups, political ideology and level of literal biblical interpretation***

The most recent Tennessee Poll by East Tennessee State University reveals that 91% of Tennesseans support the continued legalization of in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and 61% believe that a range of safe, effective and affordable methods of abortion care should be available to women.

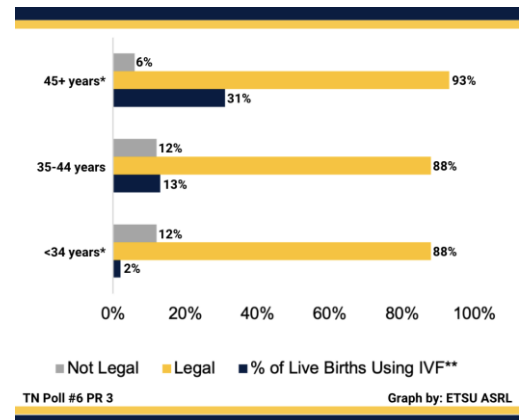
This public support comes at a time when reproductive rights are being increasingly scrutinized following the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Tennessee now has one of the nation's most restrictive abortion bans, allowing abortion only when the life of the pregnant person is at risk or the fetus is deemed nonviable. Despite these legal developments, the data shows that Tennesseans widely support both IVF and access to abortion care, signaling a disconnect between public opinion and current legislation.

The poll, which surveyed 701 Tennesseans from July 10-17, included questions on topics related to health, education and quality of life. As shown in the first press release on Sept. 20, Tennesseans report health care (including women's health) as one of the top three problems facing the state at this time. To dive into this topic a little further, the poll specifically asked questions regarding access to in-vitro fertilization (IVF), access to safe and affordable abortion care, voting choices based on candidates' stances on abortion and whether a person should go to jail or be arrested for seeking an abortion or helping their partner seek an abortion.

## Reproductive Health Access

**In-vitro Fertilization (IVF).** Overall, 91% of Tennesseans support the continued legalization of in-vitro fertilization. When this support is broken down demographically, there is a statistically significant difference ( $p = .003$ ) in support for continued legalization of IVF between women (94%) and men (87%). Respondents who are older than 45 years of age, hold a bachelor's degree or higher, or have a higher level of income show some of the strongest support for the continued legalization of IVF. These demographics are also consistent with individuals who have the highest rate of access to IVF services, which may explain this pattern of support.<sup>1,2</sup> See figure 1.

Figure 1. Do you think IVF should be legal or not legal? vs % of Live Births Using IVF

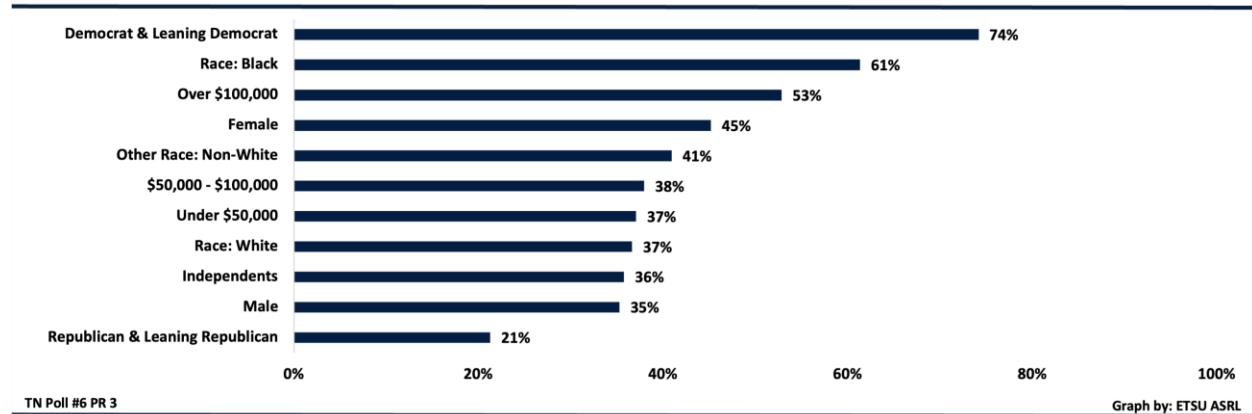


\*Age groups were combined to match live birth rate categories in HHS 2023 Fact Sheet<sup>1</sup>  
 \*\*Percent of live births conceived through IVF in 2023 by mother's age<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to opposition to the legal status of IVF, men who report a Conservative (15%) or Moderate (12%) political ideology are significantly more likely to oppose continued legalization of IVF ( $p = .029$ ) than all other ideology and gender combinations. Overall, Liberal-identifying men (95%) are more supportive of continued legalization of IVF compared to Conservative identifying men (85%), and Moderate-identifying women (95%) are more supportive of continued legalization of IVF compared to Liberal identifying women (93%). In terms of political alignment, Democrats and those who lean Democratic (96%) show the strongest support for the continued legalization of IVF, followed by Republicans or respondents leaning Republican (90%), and Independents (85%).

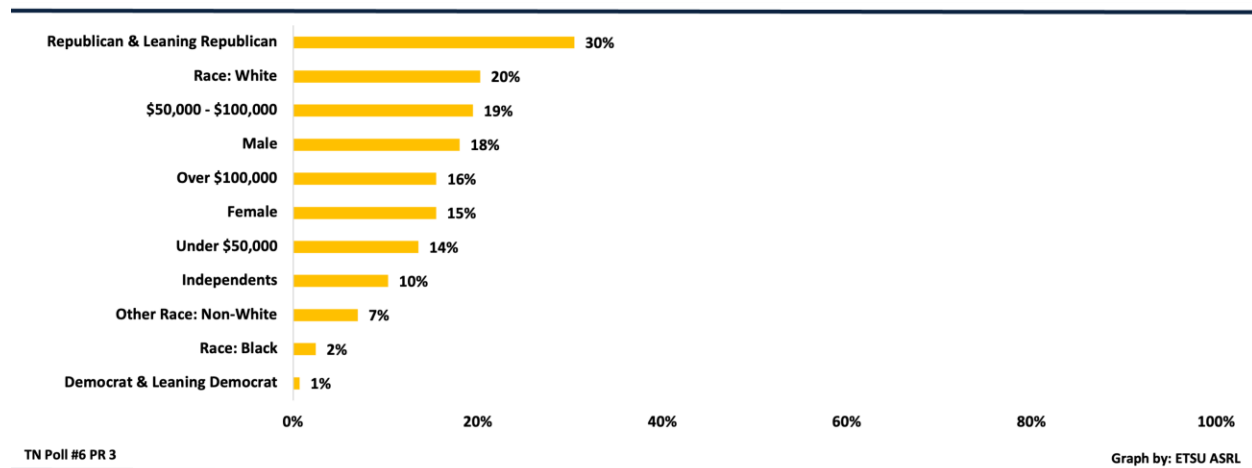
**Access to Safe and Affordable Abortion Care.** The majority of Tennesseans strongly agree (41%) or agree (20%) that a range of safe, effective and affordable methods of abortion care should be available to women in their communities. Of the 61% who strongly agree or agree, the highest level of support can be found among Democrats or respondents leaning Democrat (92%), respondents who earn more than \$100,000 per year (67%), baby boomers (66%), respondents who hold a bachelor's degree or higher (63%), women (62%), and residents of Middle and West Tennessee (64%, respectively). There is also a strong level of support across all racial groups, with Black respondents (80%) and other non-White respondents (73%) showing the highest support compared to White respondents (56%). See figure 2.

Figure 2. Strongly Agree: Support of Available Abortion Care to Women



Only 25% of Tennesseans overall either disagree (8%) or strongly disagree (17%) that women should have access to abortion services. Most Conservative women (57%) either disagree or strongly disagree that women should have access to these services – significantly higher disagreement than all other ideology and gender combinations, including Conservative men, of whom only 40% feel this way. See figure 3.

Figure 3. Strongly Disagree: Opposed to Available Abortion Care to Women



## Abortion Attitudes and Beliefs

**Personal Views.** Tennesseans were asked whether they felt abortion is always acceptable, may be acceptable depending on the circumstances or never acceptable. The vast majority (83%) felt abortion is either always acceptable (23%) or acceptable depending on the circumstances (60%). See figures 4-5. Republicans or those leaning Republican had the lowest level of any support for abortion access (73%). This group also had the highest percentage of respondents

who felt abortion is never acceptable (26%), compared to only 6% of Democrats or those leaning Democrat. In contrast, Democrats or those leaning Democrat and Black respondents showed the highest levels of support for abortion, with more than 90% finding it acceptable.

Figure 4. Overall Personal View: Having an Abortion...

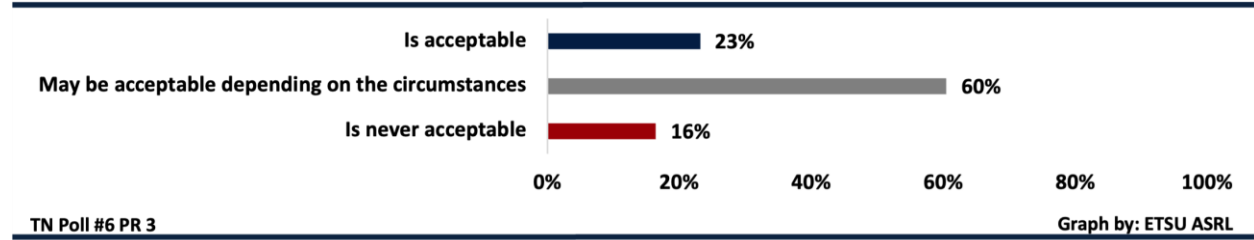
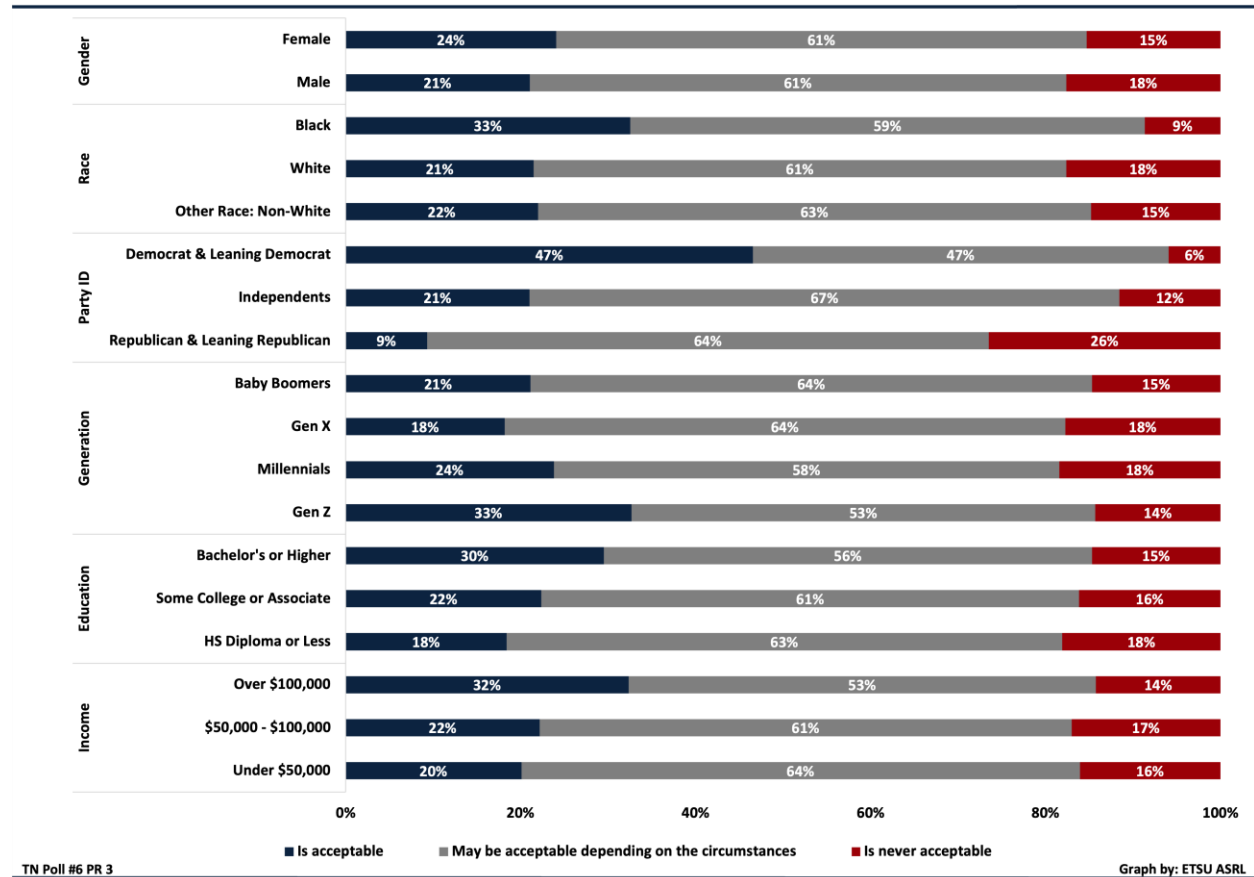


Figure 5. Personal View: Having an Abortion...

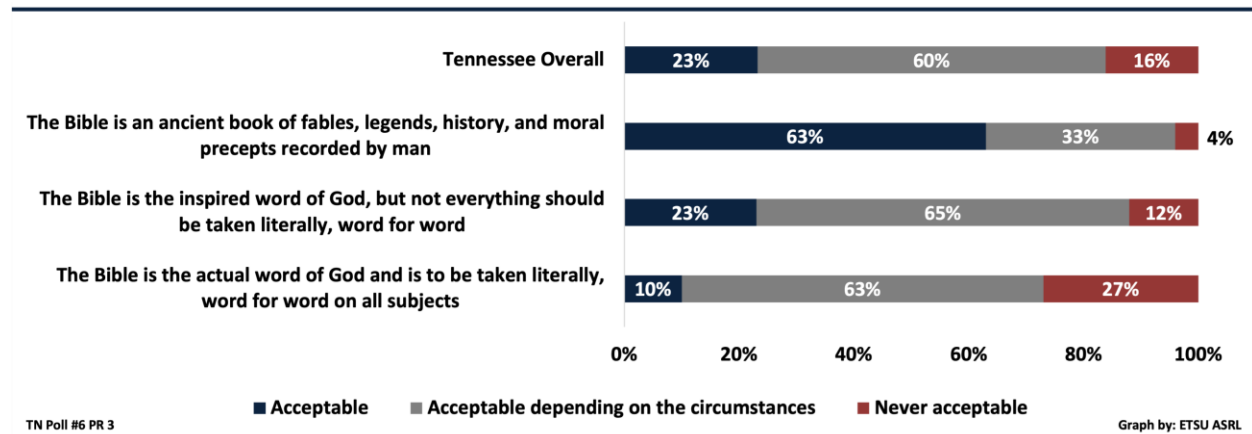


Abortion has been a significant issue for many Americans, particularly since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, with strong attention from anti-abortion and religious groups. Because of this, ASRL looked at how a respondent's view of the Bible maps to their views on abortion acceptability. In The Tennessee Poll, we ask respondents how they interpret the Bible — whether they believe it is the literal word of God to be followed exactly, the inspired word of

God but not to be taken literally in every instance, or a book of fables. This question helps gauge how strictly respondents adhere to a literal interpretation of their religious doctrine, and for our purposes, the extent to which this may or may not impact their views on other issues.

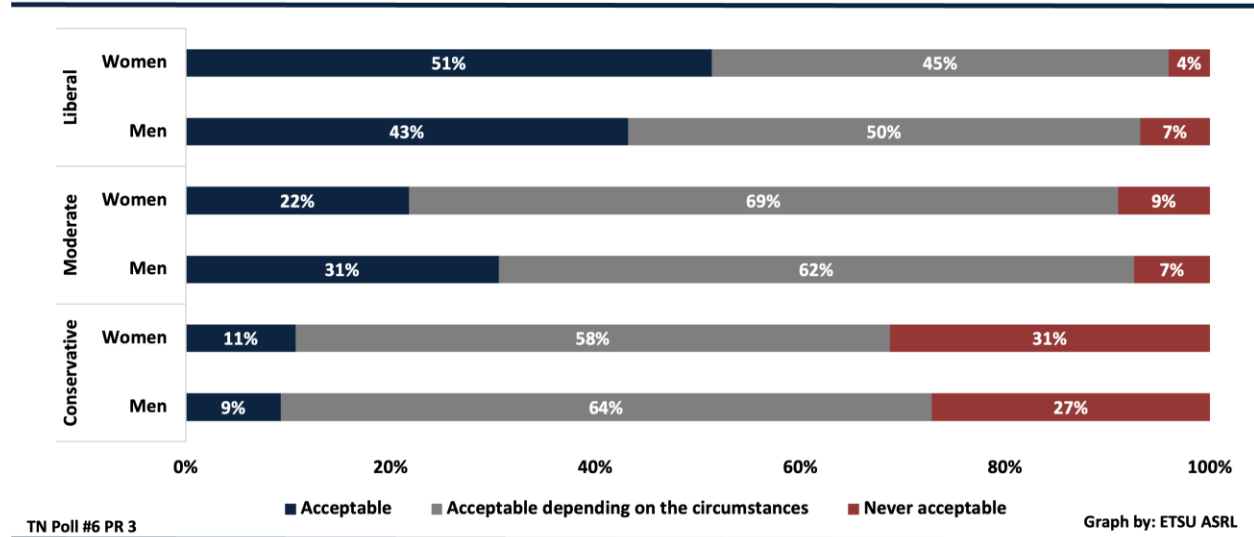
Despite their views on the Bible, the majority of Tennesseans feel that abortion is acceptable in some circumstances (83%). However, individuals who interpret the Bible less literally are more likely to believe that abortion is acceptable in any circumstance: 63% of those who see the Bible as fable, 23% of those who believe not everything should be taken literally, and 10% of those who view the Bible literally. Those who view the Bible in a literal context are significantly more likely to say that abortion is never acceptable (27%) compared to 12% of those who believe not everything should be taken literally and 4% of those who view the Bible as fable. See figure 6.

Figure 6. Acceptability of Abortions by Respondent View of the Bible



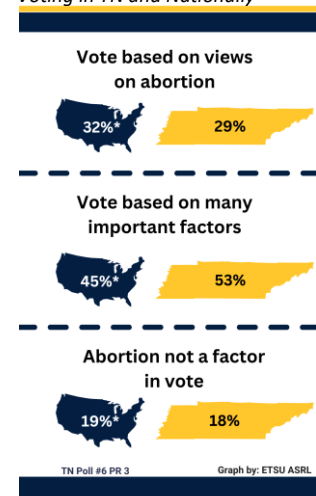
In addition to biblical literalism, there is a statistically significant difference regarding views on the acceptability of abortion by gender and political ideology. For most gender and ideology combinations, abortion acceptability depends on the circumstances compared to those who feel it is always acceptable or not at all acceptable. The only group that does not follow this trend is Liberal women, who felt abortion is more often always acceptable (51%) in comparison to other views (some circumstance – 45% and not at all – 4%). See figure 7. Consistent with their view on women being able to access abortion services, Conservative women more often view abortion as not acceptable (31%) in comparison to other groups, again, even more often than Conservative men (27%).

Figure 7. Acceptability of Abortions by Liberal/Conservative Ideology



**Voting and Abortion Policies.** Respondents were asked whether they would only vote for candidates who shared their views on abortion, whether it would be one of many topics they would consider, or whether candidates’ stances on abortion would not be a major issue. Most Tennesseans said it would only be one of many factors they consider when voting (53%). Nearly one in three Tennesseans reported they would only vote for candidates with their same views on abortion (29%), with even fewer not considering the topic in their voting plans (18%). This follows a similar national trend discussed by the Gallup Poll in June 2024.<sup>3</sup> See figure 8.

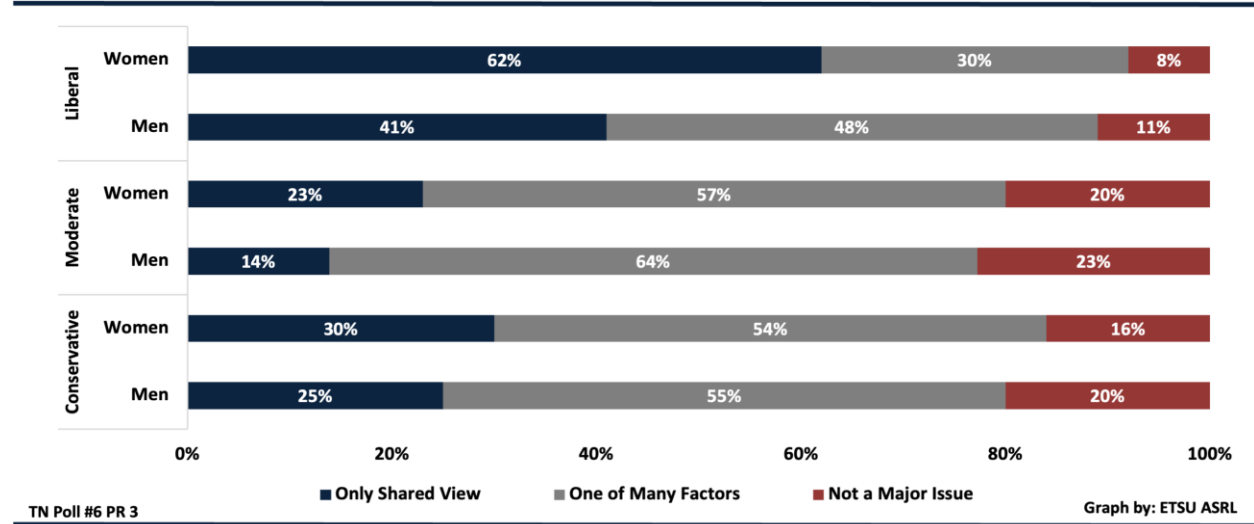
Figure 8. Abortion Views and Voting in TN and Nationally



\*Percentages do not equal to 100%.<sup>3</sup>

Tennesseans who would only vote for candidates with their same views on abortion included Democrat or those leaning Democrat (43%), women (34%), and those who view the Bible as fable (40%) compared to Independents (23%), men (23%) and those who feel not everything in the Bible should be taken literally (24%). When genders were analyzed by different political ideologies, voting for a candidate who shares their views on abortion was most significant for Liberal Tennesseans, but more so for Liberal women (62%) compared to Liberal men (41%). Moderate Tennesseans across genders were significantly more likely to say that it is not an issue for them in their vote (23% Moderate men and 20% Moderate women). Conservatives and Moderates were more likely than Liberals to say it would only be one of many issues they would consider. See figure 9.

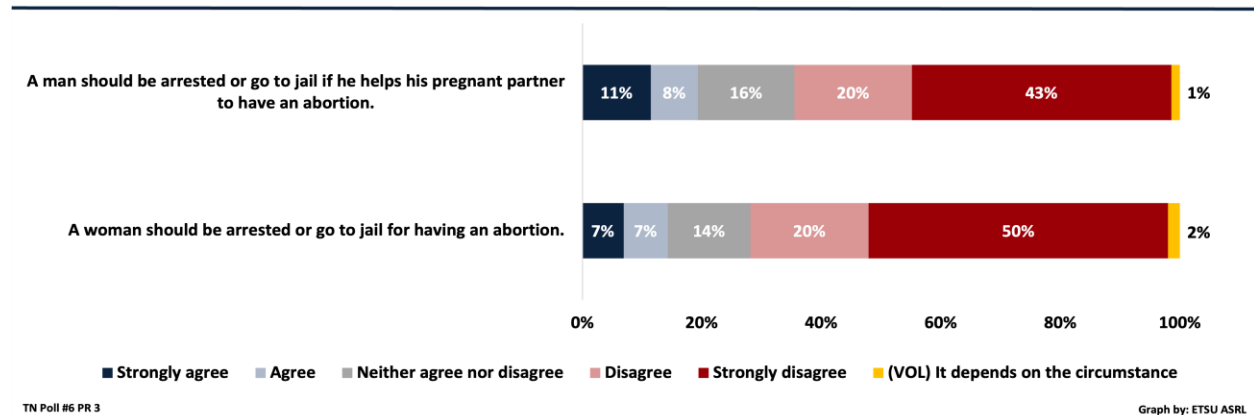
Figure 9. Abortion Views and Voting by Liberal/Conservative Ideology



## People Should *Not Go to Jail* for Accessing Abortion Services

The poll asked Tennesseans whether a woman should go to jail for seeking abortion services and whether a man should be penalized for assisting her. Most Tennesseans either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the idea of arresting either a woman or a man in these circumstances; however, they were more opposed to penalizing women (70%) than men (63%). Among those who supported arresting individuals for accessing these services, 19% favored arresting a man for helping a woman, while 14% supported arresting a woman for seeking those services. When analyzed by gender and political ideology, Conservative men and women were also more likely to agree on arresting men instead of women. See figure 10.

Figure 10. Should Men or Women be Arrested or Go to Jail for Having an Abortion



**References:**

1. U.S. Health and Human Services (2024). Fact Sheet: In Vitro Fertilization Use Across the United States. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2024/03/13/fact-sheet-in-vitro-fertilization-ivf-use-across-united-states.html>.
2. Livingston G. (2018). A third of U.S. adults say they have used fertility treatments or know someone who has. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/07/17/a-third-of-u-s-adults-say-they-have-used-fertility-treatments-or-know-someone-who-has/>.
3. Gallup © (2024). Record Share of U.S. Electorate Is Pro-Choice and Voting on It. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/645836/record-share-electorate-pro-choice-voting.aspx>.



***This is the third in a series of data releases from The Tennessee Poll. We provide methodological information, margin of error estimates, as well as detailed tables with analysis on each question by different demographic categories. To find these, or to be added to our distribution list, go to [etsu.edu/tnpoll](https://etsu.edu/tnpoll). Graphics are provided for press use.***

***Important Notes:***

This press release was originally due to be released on Oct. 11. Due to the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene on our community, we delayed the release series. We at the Applied Social Research Lab ask that you keep our impacted Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia communities in your thoughts. The toll on our communities has been profound, and your support can make a difference. To learn how you can help, visit the ETSU Response page, "[Bucs Rebuild Together.](#)"

**About the Tennessee Poll**

The Tennessee Poll is conducted by the Applied Social Research Lab (ASRL) in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at East Tennessee State University. ASRL is directed by Dr. Kelly N. Foster, professor of sociology.

The Tennessee Poll is an annual public opinion poll funded by ETSU. The mission of The Tennessee Poll is to provide the citizens and governance of Tennessee with neutral, unbiased information on Tennesseans' perceptions of issues that impact their health, education, and quality of life.

Though the project has been internally funded to date, there exists the possibility of outside researchers or organizations being given the option to purchase space for questions on future polls. Should this occur, any and all funding sources will be noted in the methodology report for that particular poll.

The Applied Social Research Lab is a member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO) and adheres to the reporting requirements of the American Association for Public Opinion Research Transparency Initiative standards in research reporting.

For detailed information on The Tennessee Poll, including methodology and additional analysis, visit [etsu.edu/tnpoll](https://etsu.edu/tnpoll).

## Survey Methodology

The Tennessee Poll uses a combination of landline and cell phone numbers randomly selected from a list of Tennessee residents aged 18 and older. Braun Research Inc. handled the cell phone sample and conducted the telephone interviews. The interviews took place between 1 p.m. and 8 p.m., with interviewers attempting to reach each respondent up to five times. The study was conducted from July 10-17, 2024. The average interview lasted 17 minutes.

The final sample consists of 701 completed interviews: 197 via landline (28%), 162 via cell phone (23%) and 342 via text to web (49%). The TTW option was introduced as a new method for residents to participate in the Tennessee Poll. The final data are weighted by age, education, sex, income and race to adjust for differential response rates in order to ensure that the data are as closely representative of the state's actual adult population as possible. The margin of error for a sample of 701 is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample. Any subpopulation analysis entails a greater margin of error. For detailed methodology, margin of error reports, and additional analysis, visit [www.etsu.edu/tnpoll](http://www.etsu.edu/tnpoll).

## About the Authors

This press release was prepared by M. Rebecca Strasser, Ms. Morgan Kidd, Dr. Kelly N. Foster and Dr. Candace Bright Hall-Wurst. Graphics prepared by Ms. Morgan Jones Kidd and M. Rebecca Strasser. For information and biographies on the contributors to this release, see [etsu.edu/asrl](http://etsu.edu/asrl).

These questions were the product of a collaborative process with our colleagues in the College of Public Health at ETSU. We wish to acknowledge and thank Drs. Kate Beatty and Mike Smith and Ms. Jordan DeJong for their help in designing the questions included in this module as well as the initial analysis of the poll findings.