

# SLU POLL

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY | YouGov®

## CONTACT:

Steven Rogers, Ph.D.  
SLU Poll Director  
Cell Phone: 314-605-8531  
steven.rogers@slu.edu

Survey results and analyses available at <http://www.slu.edu/poll/>  
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## **SLU/YouGov Poll: Voters increasingly approve of Parson, Hawley, and Blunt** *62% of voters support the state funding Medicaid expansion*

The July SLU/YouGov Poll interviewed 950 likely Missouri voters about issues important to Missourians. The survey found that voters' approval of Gov. Mike Parson and U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley increased. A majority of Missouri voters do not believe schools should teach "Critical Race Theory." A third of voters report they will not get a COVID-19 vaccine or are not sure if they will get a vaccine.

### **Key Findings on Missouri Issues**

- 62% of voters believe that the State of Missouri should fund Medicaid expansion
- 51% of voters do not think schools should be allowed to teach "Critical Race Theory"
- 54% of voters support the new student scholarship program and prohibiting Missouri state and local officials from enforcing federal gun laws
- 42% of voters think Missouri is on the right track, and 26% of voters rate the state economy as "Good" or "Excellent"
- Missourians are growing concerned about Missouri's infrastructure and roads
- 24% of Missouri voters report they do not plan to get a COVID-19 vaccine, and an additional 10% are not sure about getting vaccinated

### **Key Findings on Political Leaders**

- Gov. Parson's overall approval rating grows to 53%, a 5.7% increase in the last year
- 53% of voters approve of Parson's handling of the pandemic, a 4.6% increase in the last year
- 54% of Missouri voters disapprove of President Joe Biden's performance as president
- Sen. Josh Hawley's approval rating grows to 52%, a 3.6% increase in the last year
- 40% of Missouri voters approve of Sen. Roy Blunt's performance, 47% disapprove
- 37% of Missouri voters favorably view former governor Eric Greitens, 43% have an unfavorable view
- 33% of Missouri voters favorably view Attorney General Eric Schmitt, 26% have an unfavorable view

The margin of error for the full sample of the survey is  $\pm 4.1\%$ .

Top-line survey results can be found [here](#). Results with demographic and party cross-tabs can be found [here](#).

### **Voters increasingly approving of Governor Parson**

The latest SLU/YouGov Poll shows that 53% of likely Missouri voters approve of Mike Parson's performance as Missouri governor, which is a 5.8% increase from findings from the June 2020 SLU/YouGov Poll. Over 80% of Republicans and 58% of Independents approve of how the Governor is doing his job, but only 16% of Democrats approve. Parson's support comes from rural Missouri, where 62% of voters approve of his performance, compared to approximately 51% in suburban and urban areas.

Voters also increasingly approve of Gov. Parson's handling of the pandemic. In June 2020, 48% of voters approved, and 47% disapproved of Parson's handling of the pandemic, but in July 2021, 53% approve and 44% disapprove (margin of error  $\pm$  5.8%).

"These are impressive numbers for the Governor," said Steven Rogers, Ph.D., director of the Saint Louis University/ YouGov poll. "More voters approve of Parson's performance despite recent rises in the number of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths in Missouri."

### **Partisans Divided about President Biden and the direction of the country**

Fifty-four percent of Missouri voters disapprove of President Joe Biden's performance as President and only 45% approve. Forty-nine percent of voters approve of how Biden has handled the COVID-19 pandemic, but only 30% of voters agreed that "The United States is on the right track and headed in a good direction" (margin of error  $\pm$  5.8%). Similarly, only 24% of voters thought the U.S. Economy was "Excellent" or "Good," while 73% thought it was "Fair" or "Poor."

"More than 97% of Biden voters approve of the President's performance, but fewer than 5% of Trump voters do," said Rogers. Democrats are much happier with Biden and the direction of the country. The SLU Poll found 66% of Democrats, 17% of Independents, and 6% of Republicans think that the United States is on the right track.

"These findings are likely unsurprising given the strength of partisanship and SLU/YouGov poll's previous findings," Rogers said. "In October 2020, 53% of Missourians approved of Trump's performance (margin of error  $\pm$  3.9%). Now in 2021, 54% disapprove of Biden's performance."

Kenneth Warren, Ph.D., associate director of the SLU/YouGov poll, added "not only does political polarization among partisans explain how voters feel about elected politicians, but how they feel about issues as well."

"Missouri's Republicans and Democrats are miles apart on how they view gun control, abortion rights, and the state of the economy" Warren said.

### **Senators Hawley's and Blunt's Approval Rise**

Josh Hawley made national headlines with his challenges to the 2020 election outcome and has been a vocal opponent of Roe v. Wade and teaching critical race theory in schools. In June 2020, the SLU/YouGov Poll found that 48% of Missouri voters approved of Hawley's performance as senator (margin of error  $\pm$  4.0%), but in July 2021, 52% approved and 39% disapproved. Over 90% of Republican and 13% of Democratic voters currently approve of Hawley's performance, reflecting gains within these groups since the SLU/YouGov Poll in June 2020.

More Missouri voters disapprove than approve of Roy Blunt's performance as senator, but more voters approve of Blunt than did last year. In June 2020, 38% of voters approved of Blunt's performance, but in July 2021, 40% of voters approved, and 47% disapproved. Sixty-two percent of Republican voters, 43% of Independents, and 15% of Democratic voters approve of Blunt's performance. Both Hawley and Blunt are individually much more popular with voters than the U.S. Congress as a whole. Only 20% of Missouri voters approve of the U.S. Congress, while 69% disapprove.

### **2022 Election: Voters views of Republican U.S. Senate candidates**

In 2022, Missouri voters will vote to replace retiring Sen. Blunt. Republicans' recent success in statewide elections suggests the 2022 Republican U.S. Senate primary winner will likely win the general election.

"Missourians overall have relatively unfavorable views of some of the main Republican candidates, but Republican voters are more favorable," Rogers said,

Missourians' favorability of prominent Republican Senate Candidates:

- Former governor Eric Greitens: 37% Favorable, 43% Unfavorable, 20% Not Sure
- Attorney General Eric Schmitt: 33% Favorable, 25% Unfavorable, 41% Not Sure
- U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler: 28% Favorable; 24% Unfavorable, 49% Not Sure
- St. Louis lawyer Mark McCloskey: 28% Favorable; 32% Unfavorable, 40% Not Sure

Republican voters' favorability of these Senate Candidates:

- Former governor Eric Greitens: 56% Favorable, 23% Unfavorable, 20% Not Sure
- Attorney General Eric Schmitt: 50% Favorable, 8% Unfavorable, 42% Not Sure
- U.S. Representative Vicky Hartzler: 38% Favorable; 12% Unfavorable, 51% Not Sure
- St. Louis Lawyer Mark McCloskey: 41% Favorable; 13% Unfavorable, 47% Not Sure

"Despite a sex scandal that forced Eric Greitens to resign as Missouri's governor in 2018, his popularity among Missouri Republicans is quite high and more voters are familiar with Greitens than his competition in the upcoming U.S. Senate race," said Warren.

Mark McCloskey and his wife recently made headlines again after receiving a pardon on July 30 from Gov. Parson for misdemeanor fourth-degree assault. The McCloskeys came to the country's attention after pointing guns at social justice demonstrators in St. Louis last year. When asked in October 2020, 55% of Missouri voters said that the McCloskeys "Acted responsibly, within their rights to defend their home," and 40% said the McCloskeys acted irresponsibly (margin of error  $\pm 5.3$ ).

### **Both Republicans and Democrats are unhappy with the economy and infrastructure**

Forty-two percent of Missourians stated that the economy should be the Missouri state government's top priority. Seventy-one percent of Missourians rated the economy as "Fair" or "Poor," compared to 26% who rated the state economy as "Excellent" or "Good." Both Republicans and Democrats have negative views about the Missouri state economy. Sixty-one percent of Republicans and 77% of Democrats rated the economy as "Fair" or "Poor." Missourians' views of the economy have worsened since October 2020, where 34% of voters rated the state economy as "Excellent" or "Good" (margin of error  $\pm 3.9$ %).

A national discussion about infrastructure hits home with Missourians. Voters are growing more concerned and unhappy about the state's roads and infrastructure. Fifteen percent of

Missourians indicated “Infrastructure” should be the top priority of the Missouri state government, which is approximately a 5% increase from the October 2020 SLU/YouGov Poll. In July 2021, only 19% of Missouri voters rated “roads and infrastructure in the State of Missouri” as “Excellent” or “Good,” and 77% rated roads and infrastructure as “Fair” or “Poor” (margin of error  $\pm 6.0\%$ ). At least 69% of Republican, Democratic, and Independent Voters each rated the roads and infrastructure in the state as “Fair” or “Poor.”

### **Missourians support funding Medicaid expansion, new school scholarship program, and federal gun law ban**

Missouri voters voted to expand Medicaid in 2020 53% to 47%, but the state legislature did not fund the expansion during the 2021 regular session. Voters largely oppose the state legislature’s decision. Forty-two percent of voters “Strongly believe” and an additional 21% of voters “Believe” Missouri should fund Medicaid expansion. The expansion is supported by 96% of Democrats, 54% of independents, and 39% of Republicans. While the July 2021 poll was being conducted, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that adults aged 19 to 65 whose income is 138% of the federal poverty level are eligible for Medicaid.

Fifty-four percent of Missouri voters approve of the recently created “Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program,” which allows private donations to pay for K-12 scholarships.

“On the one hand, voters support current program regulations prioritizing access for low-income students and students with special needs,” said J. Cameron Anglum, Ph.D., assistant professor in SLU’s School of Education. “On the other hand, voters oppose the geographic limitations which currently exist, a key stipulation included to appease many rural legislators to support the bill’s passage.”

Fifty-three percent of voters believe students in low-income households should be prioritized for these scholarships, but 55% of Missouri voters oppose limiting program participation to students who live in areas with a population of 30,000 or more.

“Now that the Empowerment Program is set to go into effect ahead of the 2022-23 school year, voters may want the legislature to strongly reconsider aspects of the program’s design governing private schools that elect to participate, particularly their admissions, testing, and public reporting practices,” Anglum said.

Gov. Parson recently signed the “Second Amendment Preservation Act,” allowing state and local officers to be sued if they try to enforce federal gun laws. The controversial measure led Philip Dupuis to resign as chief of police in O’Fallon. Fifty-two percent of Missouri voters support the state law, and 38% oppose the law (margin of error  $\pm 5.8\%$ ). More than 59% of Republicans and Independents support the law, but only 16% of Democratic voters support the law.

### **Missourians do not think schools should teach “Critical Race Theory” but are less opposed to teaching about racism in institutions**

Critical Race Theory is an approach to understanding policy and institutions which considers how racism can be embedded in legal systems and laws and not only be a product of individual biases. Gov. Parson has said that “critical race theory has no business being taught in Missouri classrooms.”

Sen. Hawley also recently introduced the “Love America Act” that prevents federal funding from schools that teach that “the Constitution of the United States is a product of white supremacy or

racism.” Many see the “Love America Act” as legislation to prevent teaching “Critical Race Theory” in schools.

The SLU/YouGov Poll asked voters about this controversial issue in two different ways. Half of the poll respondents indicated if they agreed with the statement “Schools should be allowed to teach critical race theory.” A different half of respondents stated whether they agreed with the statement: “Schools should be allowed to teach about how racism can exist in society and its institutions.” When asked directly about whether “Critical Race Theory” should be taught in schools, 37% agreed, 51% disagreed, and 12% were not sure (margin of error  $\pm 5.8\%$ ). When asked if schools should be “allowed to teach about how racism can exist in society and its institutions,” 48% agreed, 37% disagreed, and 14% were not sure (margin of error  $\pm 6.0\%$ ).

“This spring, public schools became the ideological battleground over the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT), with CRT nearly becoming a ‘four-letter word’ in some circles,” said Evan Rhinesmith, Ph.D., associate director of the SLU/YouGov Poll. “These poll results indicate some voters may not possess a clear understanding of what distinguishes CRT from more general instruction related to issues of systemic racism.”

### **Nearly a Quarter of Likely Missouri Voters Polled Report they will not get a COVID-19 Vaccine**

Missouri has seen a recent surge in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths. Vaccinations are a crucial way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Sixty percent of likely Missouri voters reported they had received the injections necessary to be fully vaccinated. Those who are vaccinated are older, more educated, and have more income. Another 3% reported they have started the vaccination process but need another shot. An additional 4% of those polled reported they plan to get vaccinated.

Twenty-four percent of likely Missouri voters reported that they will not get a vaccine. There are clear partisan divisions among those who will not get vaccinated. Among voters reporting they will not get a vaccine, 58% are Republicans, 23% are Independents, and 9% are Democrats. An additional 10% of voters are not sure if they will get a vaccine. Among these voters, 51% are Republicans, 29% are independents, 15% are Democrats.

The SLU Poll team emphasizes that these figures reflect vaccination rates among likely voters and not all Missourians. At the time of this poll, the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services reported that 51% of Missourians who are at least 18 years old were fully vaccinated, and 59% had received at least one dose.

### **Methodology and Funding**

YouGov interviewed 950 likely Missouri voters between July 19, 2021 and July 29, 2021. The YouGov panel, a proprietary opt-in survey panel, is comprised of 1.2 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov Web surveys. Using their gender, age, race, and education, YouGov weighted the set of survey respondents to known characteristics of registered voters of Missouri voters from the 2020 Current Population survey. The margin of error for the weighted data is 4.1%. Reduced samples of voters answered some questions, and margins of error for these questions are indicated above. The SLU/YouGov Poll is funded by PRiME Center in SLU’s School of Education and the Saint Louis University Research Institute Big Ideas competition, which provides funding to research initiatives that demonstrate broad faculty engagement, strong leadership and compelling research plans.

**About YouGov**

Saint Louis University has partnered with YouGov to conduct its annual survey of Missourians. YouGov conducts surveys for multiple academic institutions and is the primary, trusted survey firm for media organizations, including CBS News and The Economist. An independent Pew Research Center study of online survey firms in 2016 further concluded that YouGov “consistently outperforms competitors.”

**About Saint Louis University**

Founded in 1818, Saint Louis University is one of the nation’s oldest and most prestigious Catholic institutions. Rooted in Jesuit values and its pioneering history as the first university west of the Mississippi River, SLU offers more than 12,000 students a rigorous, transformative education of the whole person. At the core of the University’s diverse community of scholars is SLU’s service-focused mission, which challenges and prepares students to make the world a better, more just place.