

# The Winthrop Poll Findings

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## General Attitudes Toward Government

- Almost 68 percent of those surveyed said they are somewhat or very unsatisfied with the moral and ethical climate of the country.
- Almost 60 percent of those surveyed say they feel “public officials don’t care much about what people like me feel.”
- Over 58 percent are very or somewhat unsatisfied with the size and influence of major national corporations in the nation.
- Those who are satisfied with the U.S. role in world affairs slightly outnumber those who say they are unsatisfied.
- State and local governments are in greater favor with the public than the federal government.

## Interpretations

Dr. Huffmon made the following observations about the responses:

“Citizens of South Carolina feel that the nation is off track and has lost its moral compass. However, faith in government increases as we look closer to home.

“A majority of South Carolinians feel that the state is headed in the right direction and we see trust in government rise as we move from national to state to local government. Majorities of respondents feel that they are ignored by public officials and that politics are too complicated to comprehend. On the other hand, a solid majority also believe that they can have an impact on what the government does. In short, it seems as if we distrust our politicians, but maintain faith in ourselves.

“Further, while South Carolinians are fairly evenly divided regarding their satisfaction with the role of the United States in world affairs, a solid majority express dissatisfaction with the influence of major corporations in this country. In the wake of Enron, Halliburton, and price gouging at the gas pump, this doesn’t seem particularly surprising.”

Detailed findings from The Winthrop Poll, Part One, regarding attitudes of S.C. citizens on whether their local, state and national governments are on the “right” or “wrong” track, and assessing their feelings of trust in each level of government to “do what is right,” When voters prepared to go to the polls this past November, almost 56 percent of South Carolina citizens said they felt the nation was “headed in the wrong direction,” with only 34.7 percent saying the U.S. is on “the right track”.

## Questions

Thinking about the current path that our nation is taking, do you think our country is on the right track or headed in the wrong direction?

Right Track 34.7%  
Wrong Direction 55.1%  
Don't Know / Refused 10.2%

Now, thinking about the current path that South Carolina is taking, do you think our state is on the right track or headed in the wrong direction?

Right Track 55.7%  
Wrong Direction 31.7%  
Don't Know / Refused 12.6%

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How much of the time do you think you can trust the national government in Washington to do what is right: Just about always, Most of the time, or only Some of the time.

Just about always 3.9%  
Most of the time 27.4%  
Some of the time 60.2%  
Never 8.1%  
Don't know/Refused .5%

How much of the time do you think you can trust the state government in Columbia to do what is right: Just about always, Most of the time, or only Some of the time.

Just about always 5.8%  
Most of the time 38.0%  
Some of the time 49.3%  
Never 4.9%  
Don't know/Refused 2.0%

How much of the time do you think you can trust your local government to do what is right: Just about always, Most of the time, or only Some of the time.

Just about always 8.2%  
Most of the time 39.0%  
Some of the time 46.8%  
Never 4.4%  
Don't know/Refused 1.6%

Next, I'm going to read some aspects of life in America today. For each one, please say whether you are -- Very satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, or Very dissatisfied. How about -- The size and power of the federal government?

Very satisfied 4.1%  
Somewhat satisfied 51.4%  
Somewhat dissatisfied 30.2%  
Very dissatisfied 12.0%  
Don't Know / Refused 2.2%

How about --The moral and ethical climate in the nation?

Very satisfied 3.6%  
Somewhat satisfied 23.7%  
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied 2.9%  
Somewhat unsatisfied 34.8%  
Very unsatisfied 33.1%  
Don't know/Refused 1.9%

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How about --The size and influence of major corporations in the nation?

Very satisfied 3.1%  
Somewhat satisfied 29.6%  
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied 4.8%  
Somewhat unsatisfied 33.7%  
Very unsatisfied 24.7%  
Don't know/Refused 4.1%

How about --The role the U.S. plays in world affairs?

Very satisfied 8.8%  
Somewhat satisfied 40.3%  
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied 2.1%  
Somewhat unsatisfied 27.3%  
Very unsatisfied 18.8%  
Don't know/Refused 2.7%

Next, I'm going to read some aspects of life in South Carolina today. For each one, please say whether you are -- Very satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, or Very dissatisfied. How about -- The overall quality of life in South Carolina?

Very Satisfied 27.7%  
Somewhat Satisfied 56.1%  
Somewhat Dissatisfied 1.1%  
Very Dissatisfied 3.6%  
Don't Know / Refused .5%

How about -- The quality of public education in South Carolina?

Very satisfied 7.0%  
Somewhat satisfied 32.4%  
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied .9%  
Somewhat unsatisfied 30.8%  
Very unsatisfied 24.4%  
Don't know/Refused 3.6%

Political Efficacy: Feeling Plugged in – Feeling that You Matter

## Interpretations

"A majority of South Carolinians feel that the state is headed in the right direction and we see trust in government rise as we move from national to state to local government." Dr. Scott Huffmon. Majorities of respondents feel that they are ignored by public officials and that politics are too complicated to comprehend. On the other hand, a solid majority also believe that they can have an impact on what the government does. In short, it seems as if we distrust our politicians, but maintain faith in ourselves.

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## Questions

Public officials don't care much about what people like me think

Strongly Agree 17.9%  
Agree 41.8%  
Neither Agree nor Disagree 8.2%  
Disagree 27.3%  
Strongly Disagree 4.4%  
Don't Know .5%

Sometimes government and politics seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly Agree 12.7%  
Agree 40.5%  
Neither Agree nor Disagree 3.2%  
Disagree 35.6%  
Strongly Disagree 7.0%  
Don't Know/ Refused 1.0%

People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly Agree 9.4%  
Agree 29.5%  
Neither Agree nor Disagree 3.8%  
Disagree 47.0%  
Strongly Disagree 9.4%  
Don't Know / Refused .9%

## Economics

- Almost 61 percent rate their personal economic situation as 'excellent' or 'good,' with 61.2 percent saying things are getting better for them, and 37.9 percent reporting things are getting worse. Almost 39 percent rate their personal economic situation as 'fair' or 'poor.'
- More than 53 percent of those surveyed rate the U.S. economy at only 'fair' or 'poor,' with 48.9 percent saying it's getting worse, and 43.6 percent saying it's getting better.
- Just over 46 percent rated the U.S. economy as 'good' or 'excellent.' Almost 61 percent of those surveyed rate the S.C. economy at only 'fair' or 'poor,' with 51.5 percent saying it's getting better and 37.9 percent saying it's getting worse.
- Just under 37 percent said the economy in S.C. is 'good' or 'excellent.' If they had to get a new job next year, an equal percentage of South Carolinians say they would need additional training to those who do not feel they would need additional training – 48.2 percent in both cases, with the remainder saying they are unsure.
- More than 89 percent of those surveyed have health insurance and most of them feel it is adequate to their needs. Almost 62 percent of those surveyed feel it should be the federal government's responsibility to "make sure all Americans have health coverage."

## Interpretations:

While most South Carolinians are optimistic about their personal economic situation these days, many also report being worried about the economy, with a greater level of concern felt about their state than about how the nation overall is doing.

"South Carolinians have clearly distinct views about the national versus state economy. While most respondents believed that both national and state economies would best be described as 'fair' or 'poor,' notably more described the state economy in those terms. Further, while just over 12 percent described the condition of the national economy as

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'excellent,' barely more than 3 percent used the same glowing term to describe the state economy. However, South Carolinians see the economic future of the state in brighter terms than that of the nation. A close majority felt that the economy of the state was getting better, while nearly 49 percent felt that the economy of the nation was getting worse. "In addition to a divide in respondent's views of the national and state economy, there also appears to be a growing economic divide among South Carolinians themselves. While a majority described their financial situation in positive terms, those who reported that their current financial situation was 'fair' or 'poor' were also more likely to see bleak economic fortunes in their future. The data show a statistically significant correlation between current economic circumstances and hope for the future. Those who are flying high see blue skies ahead while those struggling to get by predict more misery in the future.

"Those South Carolinians who have jobs feel fairly secure in them and are comfortable with the state of their finances. Nearly 54% were 'not very' or 'not at all' concerned about losing their job in the next year and slightly more than 3 out of 5 respondents felt that their personal financial situation is 'excellent' or 'good.' A similar percentage also felt that their financial situation is improving. However, although respondents felt secure in their jobs, they felt less secure about their ability to land a new job should the need arise. Nearly half of those surveyed felt that they would need some sort of additional education or job training if they had to re-enter the job market."

Detailed findings from The Winthrop Poll, Part Two, regarding attitudes of S.C. citizens on the national and state economy and their personal economic status follow.

## Questions

How would you rate economic conditions in this country today -- as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent 12.2%

Good 34.2%

Fair 37.3%

Poor 15.8%

Don't Know / Refused .5%

Right now, do you think that economic conditions in the country as a whole are getting better or getting worse?

Better 43.6%

Worse 48.9%

Don't Know / Refused 7.5%

How would you rate economic conditions in the state of South Carolina today -- as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent 3.3%

Good 33.3 %

Fair 46.4%

Poor 14.5%

Don't Know / Refused 2.5%

Right now, do you think that economic conditions in the state of South Carolina as a whole are getting better or getting worse?

Better 51.5%

Worse 37.9%

Don't Know / Refused 10.6%

How would you rate your financial situation today: excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent 11.6%

Good 49.2%

Fair 28.2%

Poor 10.5%

Don't Know / Refused .5%

Right now do you think that your financial situation as a whole is getting better or getting worse?

Better 61.2%

Worse 28.1%

Don't Know / Refused 10.8%

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How concerned are you about the possibility of losing your job in the next year? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not at all concerned...

Very Concerned 12.9%

Somewhat Concerned 11.9%

Not very Concerned 11.6%

Not at all concerned 42.2%

Not currently employed outside the home 20.5%

Don't Know / Refused .9%

If you had to find a new job in the next year, do you believe that you would need additional education or job training?

Yes 48.2%

No 48.2%

Don't Know / Refused 3.5%

Health Insurance

(there is no additional interpretation part of this section)

Do you think it is the responsibility of the government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage, or is that not the responsibility of the federal government?

Yes, it is the responsibility of the Government 61.9%

No, it is not the responsibility of the Government 34.6%

Don't Know / Refused 3.5%

Do you currently have health insurance coverage?

Yes 89.6%

No 10.4%

Don't Know / Refused 0%

Do you feel that your current health insurance is adequate for your needs?

Yes 85.3%

No 13.9%

Don't Know / Refused .8%

## Attitudes toward Gays and Lesbians

- 79 percent of those responding said religion is very important in their lives.
- 73.5 percent of those responding said the favor changing the state constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman only. Of those who favor the amendment, 21 percent said knowing there is already a state law making it illegal for two persons of the same sex to marry would change their opinion regarding the need for a change to the constitution.
- 54.2 percent of those responded indicate they have co-workers, acquaintances, close friends, or relatives whom you know to be gay or lesbian
- 64.5 percent of those responding said they believe sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is always wrong.
- Of respondents who expressed a religious preference, 54 percent said they attend church services weekly. Among self-professed Protestants, 73.8 percent said they feel "the Bible is the literal word of God and without error."
- Just over 52 percent said a religiously based alternative to evolution, such as "Intelligent Design," should be taught in South Carolina's public schools.
- Just over 53 percent said they would favor 'a moment of silence for contemplation or silent prayer' in public schools, while 42.4 percent would prefer a 'spoken prayer.'

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## Interpretations

While South Carolinians overwhelmingly favor amending the state constitution to define marriage as being between a man and a woman only, 23 percent indicate they feel gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships rather than legally marry. Huffmon made the following observations about the findings:

"Fifty-four percent of those who expressed a religious preference reported that they attended weekly church services, but a substantial 79 percent of all South Carolinians indicate religion is a 'very important' part of their lives. That's reflected in their public policy views on a variety of subjects, cementing South Carolina's position as a buckle of the Bible Belt.

"Nowhere is that more clear than on issues related to gays and lesbians. Nearly three out of four respondents oppose same sex marriage and favor a constitutional amendment to define marriage as a singularly heterosexual institution and more than 64 % said that sexual relations between same sex adults are 'always wrong.' Having a constitutional amendment on the topic on the ballot, even though state law already bans such same-sex marriage, likely will help draw religiously conservative voters to the polls, where their influence will be felt on other matters as well.

"Among self-professed Protestants (of all denominations), 73.8% feel that the Bible is without error and should be interpreted literally. That shows up in other policy preferences as well. A slight majority of respondents favored teaching a religiously based alternative to evolution, such as intelligent design, in South Carolina's public schools.

"Despite strong religious convictions, however, the respondents did show some signs of seeking a balance between religious beliefs and First Amendment civil liberties. A majority of respondents favored a 'moment of silence' to begin the school day rather than a spoken prayer."

## Questions

This November, the citizens of South Carolina will be voting on a referendum to change the state constitution to read, "A marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized in this State." Would you favor or oppose this referendum?

Favor 73.5%  
Oppose 23.0%  
Don't Know / Refused 3.5%

It is already currently against state law for two people of the same sex to be married in South Carolina, does knowing this change your opinion regarding whether the previously described constitutional change is necessary?

All Respondents  
Yes 16.8%  
No 77.8%  
Don't Know / Refused 5.3%

Among those who Favor Amendment  
Yes 21.0%  
No 75.6%  
Don't Know / Refused 3.4%

Among those who Oppose Amendment  
Yes 5.4%  
No 90.6%  
Don't Know / Refused 4.0%

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Next, we're interested in South Carolinian's views of gays and lesbians. Please remember that if you're just not comfortable answering a question, you can just let me know and we'll move on, okay?

First, do you think that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

Always wrong 64.5%  
Almost always wrong 2.6%  
Wrong only sometimes 6.1%  
Not wrong at all 18.2%  
Don't Know / Refused 8.6%

Which of the following policy positions most closely resembles your own view regarding relationships between two people of the same sex?

(Interviewer read responses)

Gay couples should be allowed to legally marry 12.4%  
Gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not legally marry; 23.0%  
There should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship 58.1%  
Don't Know / Refused 6.6%

Finally do you approve or disapprove of a law that would allow a lesbian or gay man to adopt a child if the court found them fit in all other ways to become an adoptive parent?

Approve 37.9%  
Disapprove 53.3%  
Don't Know / Refused 8.7%

Do you have any co-workers, acquaintances, close friends, or relatives whom you know to be gay or lesbian?

Yes 54.2%  
No 43.8%  
Don't Know / Refused 2.1%

## Religion

(there is no additional interpretation part of this section)

Ok, now for some different questions, at the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life, losing its influence or remaining the same?

Increasing its influence 24.7%  
Losing its influence 44.1%  
Remaining the same 29.2%  
Don't know/Refused 2.1%

Would you say this is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither a good nor bad thing?

Among those who think religion is increasing its influence  
Good thing 61.5%  
Bad thing 22.5%  
Neither a good nor bad thing 14.4%  
Don't know/Refused 1.6%

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Among those who think religion is losing its influence

Good thing 2.6%

Bad thing 91.0%

Neither a good nor bad thing 6.3%

Don't know/Refused 0%

Among those who think the influence remains the same

Good thing 22.8%

Bad thing 30.3%

Neither a good nor bad thing 41.9%

Don't know/Refused 5.0%

Would you like to see organized religion have more influence on government policy in this nation, less influence, or keep its influence as it is now?

More influence 42.2%

Less influence 20.8%

Keep its influence as it is now 32.6%

Don't know/Refused 4.4%

If you had a choice, which would you prefer in the local public schools?

(Caller: Please read all answer choices except Don't know/Refused)

Spoken prayer 42.4%

Moment of silence for contemplation or silent prayer 53.2%

Don't know/Refused 4.4%

Do you think a religiously based alternative to evolution, such as "Intelligent Design," should be taught in South Carolina's public schools?

Yes 52.1%

No 39.6%

Don't Know / Refused 8.3%

How important would you say religion is in your own life: Very important, Fairly important, or Not very important?

Very important 79.0%

Fairly important 14.8%

Not Very important 6.0%

Don't know/Refused .2%

Do you believe that the Bible is the literal word of God and without error?

Among self-professed Protestants

Yes 73.8%

No 23.4%

Don't Know / Refused 2.8%