



## **Texans Share Their Opinions on Energy and Immigration in Recent UT Tyler, Dallas Morning News Poll**

Tyler, Texas (July 6, 2021) — The University of Texas at Tyler and The Dallas Morning News recently released a poll to Texas voters to examine how the public is responding to bills passed by the 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, new changes in immigration policy and the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The poll provides a glimpse of public attitudes during the time national leaders like Vice President Kamala Harris, First Lady Jill Biden and former President Donald Trump were in the state or about to visit. It also comes just days before the Texas Legislature returns for a special session, which Governor Greg Abbott called to consider unresolved legislation.

### **Views on New State Laws**

The public's assessment of the accomplishments of the 2021 legislative session is mixed. One reason is because the upcoming special session is a result of the legislature failing to pass its election bill (SB 7). Governor Abbott signaled that election integrity would be on the special session agenda; however, a quarter of all voters believe a new bill will reduce fairness in Texas' elections, and 41% believe that the bill will either preserve or restore fairness.

Voters are also still concerned that addressing the crisis from electricity and utilities outages during the winter was not more of a priority. In February and April, a majority of voters felt enough was being done early on. This changed in the summer, with 51% of voters indicating that the response was not done well or not done well at all. This switch occurred just after energy companies requested customers use less energy as temperatures rose in June. The public's concern over the power grid is also apparent as 60% of registered voters lost confidence that the Texas power grid would not be subject to blackouts in the summer months.

The redirection of state funds after the session ended to continue construction of a barrier at the Texas-Mexico border has caught the public's attention. The public is largely split along partisan lines about providing more state revenue to the completion of the project (43% support, 35% oppose). Additionally, 30% of the public expect that they will definitely or probably personally donate toward the project via the designated website.

"These actions are occurring as 46% of Texans approve of how Governor Abbott is handling border security, compared to 32% of Texans who approve of how President (Joe) Biden is handling the issue," said Mark Owens, PhD, UT Tyler associate professor of political science, who directed the poll.

In contrast to the public's division on the necessity of a wall, Texans remain supportive of granting permanent legal status to immigrants who came illegally as children. "We have seen public support dip slightly after recent attention to unaccompanied minors crossing the border, but Texans still support this policy at 47% compared to 24% who oppose," said Ken Wink, PhD, UT Tyler College of Arts and Sciences associate dean.

The passage of HB 3979 led to conversations about the prohibition of teaching critical race theory in Texas' K-12 public schools. Governor Abbott also added to his call for a special session intent to consider a stronger bill. However, a majority of the voters surveyed indicated that they believe teachers should be “permitted to discuss how examples of discrimination in our laws apply to inequalities today.”

### **Vaccine Acceptance**

Beyond policy, Texans are continuing to manage life in a pandemic. In his address to Congress, President Biden set a goal for 70% of adults to be vaccinated before July 4. During that time, Texas has worked to reopen quickly, and the percentage of Texans who have received the vaccine has increased from 21% in February to 55% last week.

“As more Texans that have received the vaccine, the percentage of the public who say that they will not take the vaccine has also increased to 21% of the population,” said Owens. “That is a 5% increase from February in aversion toward the vaccine.”

Although the rate of vaccinations is slowing down, 40% of those who have not received the vaccine reported making an appointment in the past two weeks to do so. As for the other 60%, it is clear the primary reason for hesitancy is a concern about the side effects (34%) and waiting to see how others they know react (16%). Other reasons for not setting an appointment yet included not having enough information (16%), busy schedules (6%), or no intention to take the vaccine (16%).

With a mission to improve educational and healthcare outcomes for East Texas and beyond, UT Tyler offers more than 80 undergraduate and graduate programs to 10,000 students. Through its alignment with The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler and UT Health East Texas, UT Tyler has unified these entities to serve Texas with innovative medical research, medical education and excellent patient care. Classified by Carnegie as a doctoral research institution and by U.S. News & World Report as a national university, UT Tyler strives to fulfill our primary missions of education, research and service.

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