

**To:** Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund

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## **Poll Shows Mississippi Voters Strongly Support Restoring Ballot Initiative Process**

Tulchin Research recently conducted a survey of likely voters in Mississippi on behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund to gauge public opinion around the State Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn a voter approved medical marijuana ballot initiative and essentially invalidate the state's ballot initiative system altogether in the process. Our statewide survey finds overwhelming support across party lines for using ballot initiatives as a method for passing laws in Mississippi and bipartisan rejection of the court's decision to overturn ballot measures as a whole in Mississippi. Furthermore, the poll finds strong bipartisan support for the State Legislature and Governor Reeves to take immediate action to restore the ballot initiative process in the state. We present findings from the poll below.

### **Voters Overwhelmingly Support the Ballot Initiative Process in Mississippi**

Our poll finds Mississippi voters overwhelmingly support using voter approved ballot initiatives as a method for passing laws in the state. Specifically, five out of six voters (82%) indicate they prefer "including passing laws and policies in the state legislature as well as through voter approved ballot measures." Conversely, just one-in-ten voters (10%) believes the state should "only include passing laws and policies through the state legislature and NOT through voter approved ballot initiatives". It is also important to note that this preference exists across party lines in this red state. Notably, ballot initiatives in addition to legislation is preferred by overwhelming portions of Democrats (81%), Republicans (81%) and independents (85%).

### **Preference of Methods for Passing Laws in Mississippi**

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<i>Include passing laws and policies in the state legislature as well as through voter approved ballot initiatives</i>	82%	81%	81%	85%
<b>OR</b>				
<i>Only include passing laws and policies through the state legislature and NOT through voter approved ballot initiatives</i>	10%	9%	13%	7%
Don't Know	8%	10%	6%	9%

### Voters Reject the State Supreme Court’s Interference in the Ballot Initiative Process

Our poll finds that Mississippi voters also thoroughly reject the State Supreme Court issuing rulings that jeopardize the state’s ballot initiative process. Nearly three-quarters of voters (73%) say they oppose permitting the court to “overturn ballot initiatives voters have already approved,” including a solid majority (59%) who *strongly* oppose such actions. Opposition to the court overturning initiatives that voters have already approved includes majorities of Democrats (76% oppose), Republicans (71% oppose) and independents (73% oppose).

*Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose permitting the Mississippi State Supreme Court to overturn ballot initiatives voters have already approved?*

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>
Strongly Oppose	59%	63%	56%	57%
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>17%</b>
Don't Know	8%	9%	7%	10%
<b>Oppose – Support</b>	<b>+54</b>	<b>+61</b>	<b>+49</b>	<b>+56</b>

A similar overwhelming majority of voters (71%) also opposes “eliminating ballot initiatives entirely in Mississippi”, including 54% who strongly oppose. Again, opposition is robust across partisan lines, including 72% of Democrats, 71% of Republicans and 67% of independents.

*Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose eliminating ballot initiatives entirely in Mississippi?*

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>67%</b>
Strongly Oppose	54%	58%	52%	53%
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Don't Know	13%	9%	13%	19%
<b>Oppose – Support</b>	<b>+54</b>	<b>+54</b>	<b>+55</b>	<b>+53</b>

### Voters Oppose State Supreme Court’s Decision to Overturn Medical Marijuana Initiative

More specifically, nearly seven-in-ten Mississippi voters (68%) say they oppose the State Supreme Court’s recent decision to overturn the voter approved ballot initiative permitting the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes on a legal technicality, despite its recent passage with overwhelming support (73% Yes to 27% no in the 2020 elections). Opposition to this decision crosses party lines and includes solid majorities of Democrats (75% oppose), Republicans (61% oppose) and independents (69% oppose).

**Opposition to State Supreme Court’s Overturning of Medical Marijuana Initiative**

*As you may know, last year voters in Mississippi approved a statewide ballot initiative permitting the use of marijuana for medical purposes with 73 percent support. However, the Mississippi State Supreme Court recently overturned the measure on a technicality.*

*Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the State Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the ballot initiative allowing the use of marijuana for medical purposes?*

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>26%</b>
“Strongly” support	15%	13%	18%	13%
<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>69%</b>
“Strongly” oppose	57%	64%	49%	59%
<i>Don’t Know</i>	4%	4%	4%	4%
<b>Support – Oppose</b>	<b>-40</b>	<b>-53</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-43</b>

**Voters Want State Legislature & Governor Reeves to Update Mississippi Law to Comply with Court Ruling and Restore the Initiative Process**

According to the State Supreme Court’s ruling, the Mississippi State Legislature must pass a law to update requirements around the state’s ballot initiative process in order to restore the medical marijuana initiative and the initiative process as a whole. Currently, close to eight-in-ten Mississippi voters (79%) say they want the State Legislature to update the law to comply with the court’s ruling as soon as possible, including overwhelming majorities of Democrats (80%), Republicans (80%) and independents (77%).

**Support for State Legislature Updating State Law to Comply with Court Ruling**

*For the state’s ballot initiative process to resume, the State Legislature needs to pass a law to update the ballot initiative process according to the State Supreme Court’s ruling*

*Should the State Legislature update the law as soon as possible to comply with the State Supreme Court’s ruling to restore the state’s ballot initiative process?*

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<i>Don’t Know</i>	8%	7%	9%	9%
<b>Yes – No</b>	<b>+67</b>	<b>+67</b>	<b>+69</b>	<b>+63</b>

Reinforcing voters’ keen desire for the legislature to update Mississippi law and restore the ballot initiative process in the state, a near supermajority of voters (63%) say they would be *“more likely”* to vote for a state legislator who voted to restore the state’s ballot initiative process. Conversely, 65% of all voters say they would be *“less likely”* to support a legislator who voted to eliminate the initiative process altogether.

**Political Impact of Legislators Vote to Restore/Eliminate Initiative Process**

<i>Would you be more or less likely to vote for a state legislator if they <u>voted to restore</u> the state's ballot initiative process?</i>		<i>Would you be more or less likely to vote for a state legislator if they <u>voted to eliminate</u> the state's ballot initiative process?</i>	
<b>More Likely</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>More Likely</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Less Likely</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>Less Likely</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>More – Less</b>	<b>+48</b>	<b>Less – More</b>	<b>+50</b>

Additionally, voters want Governor Reeves to do his duty and call a special session immediately to resolve the ballot measure question. Specifically, more than three-quarters of voters (76%) believe the Governor should call a special session this summer to update the law to restore the state's ballot initiative process in time for the next round of statewide elections in 2023. Again, support for the Governor calling a special session to restore the ballot measure process includes significant majorities of Democrats (77% yes), Republicans (73% yes) and independents (75% yes).

**Support for Governor Reeves Calling Special Session of the Legislature**

<i>While it may be too late to fix the law to permit ballot initiatives in 2022, the Governor will need to call a special session by the end of this Summer to revise the ballot initiative process by 2023. Knowing this, do you believe the Governor should call a special session this summer to update the law to restore the state's ballot initiative process in time for the 2023 November election?</i>				
	<b>All Voters</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>Independents</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Yes – No</b>	<b>+59</b>	<b>+62</b>	<b>+53</b>	<b>+59</b>

The poll also shows that failure by the Governor to call this special session to restore the initiative process could prove politically costly for him as voters already hold mixed views of his tenure in office (48% view the Governor favorably while 46% view him unfavorably, with the intensity of the opinions of his detractors outpacing that of his supporters (20% very favorable vs. 29% very unfavorable).

**Favorability Rating of Governor Reeves**

<b>Please indicate if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of Governor Tate Reeves</b>	
<b>TOTAL FAVORABLE</b>	<b>48%</b>
“Very” Favorable	20%
<b>TOTAL UNFAVORABLE</b>	<b>46%</b>
“Very” unfavorable	29%
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Favorable – Unfavorable</b>	<b>+2</b>

Furthermore, 57% of voters say they would be *“less likely”* to support the Governor’s re-election if he refuses to call a special session by the end of the summer to restore the ballot initiative process. This includes a majority of independents (57% less likely) as well as a substantial plurality of Republicans (44% less likely).

**Political Impact of Governor Reeves Calling Special Legislative Session**

<i>Would you be more or less likely to support Governor Reeves’ reelection if he doesn’t call a special session by the end of the summer to restore the ballot initiative process?</i>				
	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
<b>More Likely</b>	17%	12%	23%	14%
<b>Less Likely</b>	57%	72%	44%	57%
<i>Don’t know</i>	26%	16%	33%	28%
<b>More - Less</b>	<b>-40</b>	<b>-60</b>	<b>-21</b>	<b>-43</b>

**Conclusion**

In sum, Mississippi voters emphatically disapprove of the State Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the will of the voters and invalidate both the medical marijuana ballot initiative and the initiative process altogether. Voters across party lines overwhelmingly support ballot initiatives as a means of passing laws in the state and demand that Governor Reeves and the State Legislature take immediate action to update state law this summer to restore the initiative process. And as this poll clearly shows, failure to do so could come with a steep political cost as voters indicate they will reject candidates for office who do not support the ballot initiative process and will not protect it.

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**Survey Methodology:** From June 12 – 17, 2021, Tulchin Research conducted a survey among 600 likely voters in Mississippi. The survey was conducted by contacting voters by landline and cell phone as well as online through email and text message. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 4.00 percentage points.