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**The Poll Tax Issue**

# First Study of Public Opinion On Poll Tax Issue Completed By Institute in National Survey

**Sentiment in 8 States With Poll Taxes  
Is Opposed to Abolition, but Nation  
As a Whole Votes to Lift Restriction**

By **DR. GEORGE GALLUP**  
Director, American Institute of Public Opinion  
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PRINCETON, N. J., Apr. 1.—One of the political problems being widely discussed throughout the South is the question of abolishing poll taxes which are still a requirement for voting in eight Southern states.

Campaigns headed by civic and other groups have been started in nearly all of the eight states to repeal the poll taxes, and a bill has been introduced in Congress by Rep. Geyer of California to bar the poll tax as a requirement for voting in Federal elections.



With public discussion of the issue just beginning to take shape, the American Institute of Public Opinion has conducted a survey to measure first public reaction to the anti-poll tax campaign, both in the poll tax states as a group and throughout the rest of the country. The study is the first of a series which will be conducted by the Institute in future months to measure the trends of sentiment on this issue.

Today's survey results reveal three facts about public opinion on the poll tax question.

1. Throughout the nation as a whole, a large majority of voters are in favor of abolishing all existing poll taxes.

2. In the 13 Southern states public opinion is of mixed complexion on the issue. In the five Southern states which have already abolished poll taxes, or never had them, a majority wants to see them repealed in the other parts of the South where poll taxes are still in force.

However, in the 8 states which still have poll taxes—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia—majority sentiment is still in favor of retaining the tax.

In those 3 states the issue was posed as follows:

"Should the poll tax be abolished as a requirement for

voting in this state?"

The attitude of persons who have paid their poll taxes and are eligible to vote is as follows for the 8 poll tax states combined:

POLL TAX STATES (Vote of Persons Who Have Paid Their Poll Tax)	
FOR ABOLISHING POLL TAX	34%
FOR RETAINING POLL TAX	59
NO OPINION	7

The survey also included, however, persons of voting age who, through failure to pay the poll tax, are not eligible to vote. When they are added to the others who have paid their taxes, the combined sentiment is:

POLL TAX STATES (Persons Who Have Paid Poll Tax Combined With Those Who Have Not)	
FOR ABOLISHING POLL TAX	35%
FOR RETAINING POLL TAX	53
NO OPINION	12

In interpreting these figures it must be remembered that the percentages apply to the 3 poll tax states as a whole, and are not necessarily typical for each of the states individually. Special studies with larger samples are necessary to report sentiment by individual states.

**How Rest of Nation Feels**

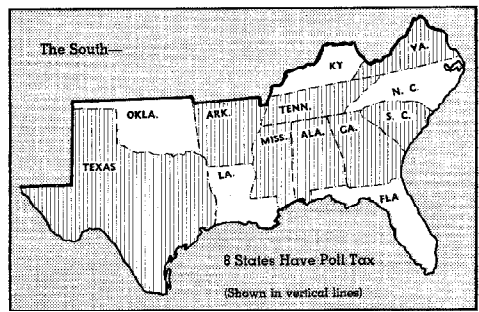
The next aspect of the question is—what is the sentiment of the rest of the South (the five non-poll tax states), and of the country as a whole?

Here are the findings of the survey on that score:

"Some Southern states require every voter to pay a poll tax amounting to \$1 a year or more before they can vote. Do you think these poll taxes should be abolished?"

VOTE IN 5 SOUTHERN STATES WITH NO POLL TAX	
FOR ABOLISHING POLL TAX	51%
FOR RETAINING POLL TAX	36
NO OPINION	13

TOTAL UNITED STATES VOTE	
FOR ABOLISHING POLL TAX	63%
FOR RETAINING POLL TAX	25
NO OPINION	12



Florida, Louisiana and North Carolina formerly levied poll taxes but abolished them in recent years.

The average tax in the 3 states with poll tax requirements is about \$1.75. In some states the taxes are cumulative so that a voter might be required to pay as much as \$36 before he could vote.

In the early days of the Republic only people who owned property could vote. Poll taxes were adopted in those days as a

means of widening the suffrage. By paying a few dollars poll tax, persons could vote without having to own property.

Contrary to popular impression, the present poll tax system in the South is of comparatively recent origin, dating back only to the period between 1890 and the early 1900's. The taxes were levied chiefly as a means of combating the popularity of the Populist Party among poor whites in the South.

## Arguments Pro and Con

Here are some of the arguments on the poll tax which were stressed by persons interviewed in the South by field reporters for the Gallup Poll:

**FOR ABOLISHING THE TAX**

A 76-year-old farmer in Hazen, Ark., expressed his opinion to Institute interviewer Bess Lay as follows:

"You can't find a man in this whole county that voted for the poll tax in the first place—it was just put on and run over the people."

Over in De Valls Bluff, Ark., another farmer felt the poll tax system encouraged political corruption. He told an Institute interviewer:

"It's gotten so rotten the way they purchase those poll taxes that the whole poll tax system ought to be done away with."

From Knoxville, Tenn., interviewer Roger Johnson reports the following statement by a time-keeper in a textile mill:

"I don't think it's right to make some people pay a poll tax while others in other states don't have to."

A 37-year-old bookkeeper in the same city expressed his view this way: "Abolishing the tax would eliminate a lot of election frauds and produce more votes and a

more democratic form of government."

**FOR RETAINING THE TAX**

In Kosciusko, Miss., an Institute reporter interviewed a 30-year-old farm wife who had this to say in casting her vote to retain the poll tax:

"Poll taxes help pay for the schools and keep the Negroes from voting."

A 30-year-old insurance agent in Virginia, expressing an attitude held by many voters in the survey, said:

"We ought to keep the poll tax because when you pay a tax you're more interested in the results of an election."

One poor white farmer in the deep South was for retaining the poll tax because he thought there were many people who wouldn't take voting seriously enough to be able to vote intelligently. He said:

"Better keep the poll tax because if we don't have it some people will just vote 'cause somebody gives 'em a bottle of whiskey or a dollar bill."