

Voters and Experts Don't Always See the Same Priorities for Alabama

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It can be hard for elected officials to know what voters really want. A new initiative from the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama is trying to clue them in. Alabama Priorities will roll out this year and it starts with a survey that asks both voters and experts to rank the most important issues facing the state. According to the survey, these are the top priorities.

ALABAMA PRIORITIES

1.	K-12 Education
2.	Healthcare
3.	Government Corruption and Ethics
4.	Mental Health and Substance Abuse
5.	Poverty and Homelessness
6.	Jobs and the Economy
7.	Crime and Public Safety
8.	Job Training and Workforce Development
9.	Improving the State's Image
10.	Tax Reform

(https://news.wbhm.org/media/2018/02/PARCA_10.jpg)

That list doesn't surprise Randolph Horn. He's a political science professor at Samford University and conducted the study with PARCA.

"As you might expect most people in the state support public education," says Horn. "Most people are concerned about healthcare. Most people want ethical politicians and safe streets."

Horn says they didn't see polarization either when breaking down the responses by demographics such as political ideology, gender, race or age. Most groups put similar items in their top 10.

But there were notable differences in how experts ranked some issues compared to voters.

Experts' Priorities Not in Voters' Top 10

Issue	Experts' Rank	Voters' Rank	Gap
Infrastructure and Transportation	4	15	11
Prison and Sentencing Reform	5	13	8
Funding State Government	6	16	10
Civil Rights	7	12	5

www.parcAlabama.org
 (https://news.wbhm.org/media/2018/02/Experts_not_in_Voters_10.jpg)

To some extent these are sort of inside-baseball issues," says Horn. For instance, Horn says many leaders are aware the state faces federal intervention because of overcrowding and other issues with Alabama's prison system. "But our state prisons are literally out-of-sight and out-of-mind for most of the public."

Meanwhile, several items were of more importance to voters than the experts.

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