

Task force completes study of SBC name change

by [Bob Allen](#)

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) – A task force appointed to study a possible name change for the Southern Baptist Convention has completed its work and will bring recommendations to the SBC Executive Committee Feb. 20.

“We are excited to make these recommendations believing that we have come to decisions that will please the Father and greatly strengthen our ability to reach more people with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,” task force chair Jimmy Draper, former head of LifeWay Christian Resources, said in a statement released through Baptist Press. “From the beginning we have desired only to discern God's will in this matter.”

SBC President Bryant Wright appointed the advisory group without Executive Committee action last fall. Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., said he believed the current name is too regional and that a new identity might make the convention more effective in church planting.

Southern Baptists have rejected proposals to rename the convention eight times since 1965. The last was in 2004, when messengers to the convention voted 55 percent to 45 percent against then-President Jack Graham's suggestion to appoint a committee to study a new name to better reflect the convention's geographical scope.

Conventional wisdom holds that the “Southern” designation -- a holdover from North-South separation prior to the Civil War -- is a hindrance to appealing to converts beyond the Bible Belt. A new study by LifeWay Research, however, found that Southern Baptists have a more negative image in areas where they are

better known.

Polling by the research arm of the SBC publisher LifeWay Christian Resources [found](#) that a majority of Americans -- 53 percent -- have a favorable impression of Southern Baptists. Forty percent, however, said they have a negative impression, ranking Southern Baptists behind Methodists and Catholics in popularity but ahead of Mormons and Muslims.

Americans in the South (40 percent) and West (44 percent) were found more likely to have an unfavorable opinion than those in the Northeast (34 percent) and Midwest (36 percent).

Americans age 18-29 were least likely to have a somewhat favorable opinion (26 percent) and the most likely to have a very unfavorable opinion (25 percent).

LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer said many would likely see the research as “a bit of a Rorschach Test -- people will see in it what they want to see.” He opened the comments section on his blog to discussion of what the findings might mean.

Ideas ranged from the anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church giving Baptists a bad name to “our stubborn resistance to change/increasing methodological irrelevance.”

“If I were a betting man, I'd say part of it is the impression that Baptists are fighting and ‘against’ things,” Stetzer offered. “Then, I would add that some of it is that Southern Baptists believe things that the world does not like.... You can fix the first part but not the second.”

Draper didn't offer many hints to what the task force, which has no formal authority and will report to the Executive Committee by invitation of the president, might recommend, but he told Baptist Press that no one on the 19-member task force believed the word “Baptist” should be removed from the convention's name.