

**TO:** Interested Parties

**FR:** Robert P. Jones, CEO; Daniel Cox, Director of Research

**RE: Religion, Values, and Immigration Reform: Attitudes of Arkansas Residents in the National Context**

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A new survey by Public Religion Research Institute finds broad support among Arkansas residents and Americans nationwide for a comprehensive approach to immigration reform and strong approval for clergy speaking out on the issue. The nationwide telephone survey of 1,201 Americans, along with two state surveys of Ohio (n=402) and Arkansas (n=402) residents, was conducted March 5–11, 2010. The study was sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

## The Arkansas Context

Arkansans are somewhat more likely than the general public to express disapproval of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president (51% vs. 44% respectively). The vast majority of Arkansas residents, like Americans nationwide, are strongly dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country (79% and 75% respectively).

Compared to all Americans, Arkansans are somewhat less likely to be Republican. Only 1-in-5 identify as Republican, compared to 28% of Americans nationally. However, Arkansans have a similar ideological profile as the general public. A plurality (44%) identify politically as conservative, 28% identify as moderate, and 17% identify as liberal.

Arkansas residents also report higher levels of economic hardship than the general public. A majority (51%) of Arkansas residents report that they are in only fair shape or poor shape financially, compared to 46% of Americans nationwide.

## Views of the Immigration System and Immigrants

Arkansans agree with Americans nationwide that the immigration system is broken or completely broken (56% each); only 7% say the system is generally working.

About half of Arkansas residents, like Americans overall, say the issue of immigration is very or extremely important to them personally (51% and 47% respectively). But Arkansans are significantly less likely to be informed about the immigration system than Americans overall; 59% say they know a lot or some about the immigration process, compared to 73% of the general public.

Arkansans are also less likely than Americans overall to say it is difficult for immigrants to come to the U.S. legally. Half of Arkansans, compared to 6-in-10 of all

Americans, say it is somewhat or very difficult for immigrants to come to the U.S. legally today. Arkansans are also less likely than Americans overall to believe immigrants today face a more difficult time coming to the U.S. than previous generations.

Arkansas residents are more likely than the general American public to have negative views of the contributions of immigrants. Just 36% of Arkansas residents, compared to a plurality (45%) of the general public, say immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents. Arkansas residents are also more likely than the general public to believe illegal immigrants take jobs that American workers want (58% and 48% respectively).

## Values and Support for Immigration Reform

Despite holding somewhat negative views of the contributions of immigrants, like their fellow Americans, Arkansans agree on the importance of a set of values to guide immigration reform and strongly support comprehensive immigration reform.

Arkansans agree with Americans nationwide about the most important values that should guide immigration reform. Overwhelming majorities of Arkansans say ensuring fairness to taxpayers (89%), enforcing the rule of law and protecting national security (88%), protecting the dignity of every person (81%), and keeping families together (80%) are very or extremely important values for immigration reform.

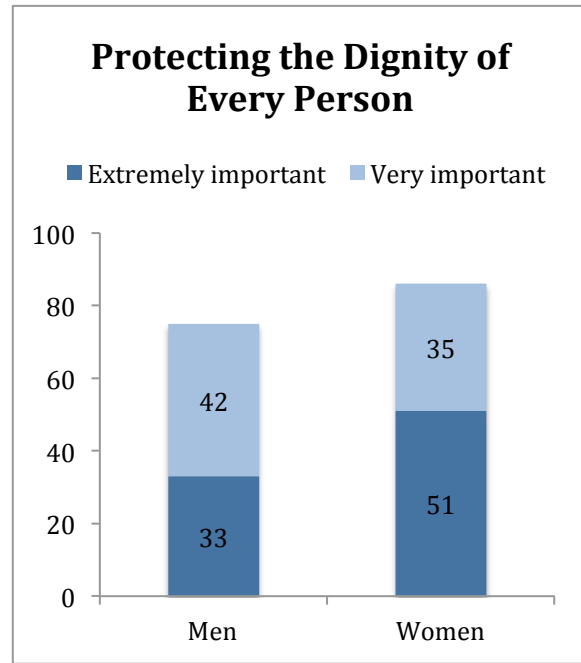
Nearly 9-in-10 Arkansans, like Americans overall, support an earned path to citizenship for illegal immigrants (87% and 86% respectively), one of the key provisions of comprehensive immigration reform.

Like Americans nationwide, Arkansas residents favor comprehensive immigration reform over alternatives emphasizing enforcement only by nearly 2-to-1. When asked to choose between a description of comprehensive reform and an argument that illegal immigrants should not be rewarded with amnesty or taxpayer-funded social services, 57% of Arkansans choose comprehensive reform with an earned path to citizenship, compared to 30% who embrace the opposing position—a 27-point margin. This support is only slightly lower than support among Americans nationwide, where 63% choose comprehensive reform, compared to 32% who embrace the opposing position.

Arkansans are also significantly more likely than Americans overall to believe immigration reform is an urgent problem for families. When provided with an argument about the importance of dealing with immigration reform because it separates families, 56% say Congress should fix the system this year, compared to less than half (46%) of all Americans.

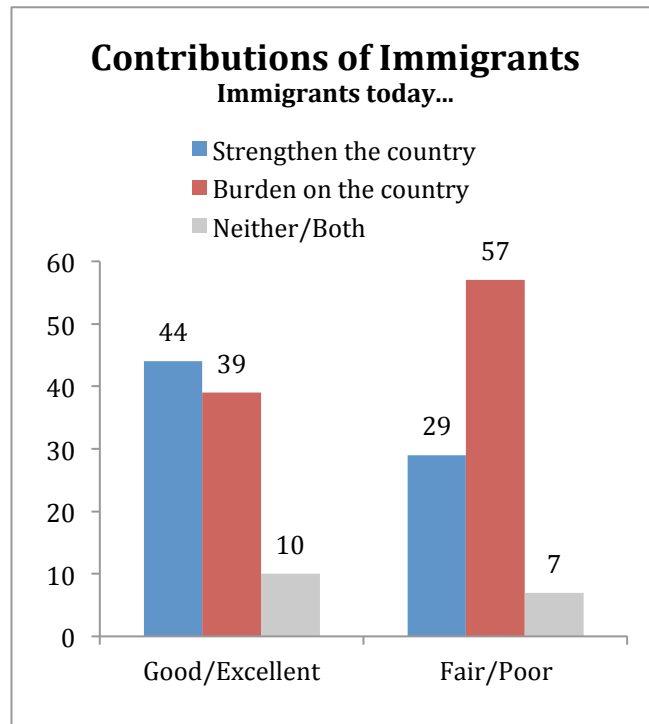
### Gender Differences in Support for Values

While there are no significant gender differences among all Americans, Arkansas women hold stronger views than Arkansas men on some key values that should guide immigration reform. Eighty-six percent of women say protecting the dignity of every person is extremely or very important. Seventy-five percent of men agree, but significantly fewer men than women say it is an extremely important value (33% vs. 51%). More than 8-in-10 women also say keeping families together is an extremely (49%) or very (35%) important value. Three quarters of men also agree, but again significantly fewer men than women (35% vs. 49%) say that it is extremely important.



### Differences in Views by Economic Well-being

Arkansas residents who report their economic condition is fair or poor are more likely than those who report their condition is good or excellent to have unfavorable views of immigrants. Among Arkansas residents who report being in good or excellent economic condition, a slight plurality (44%) say immigrants today strengthen the country due to their hard work and talents. Among those who are doing less well, only 29% agree, and a majority (57%) say immigrants are a burden because they take jobs, housing and health care from other Americans. Nationally, these economic well-being effects are present but not as pronounced; among Americans reporting being in fair or poor



economic condition, 40% say immigrants strengthen the country, and 50% say immigrants are a burden on the country.

Views of *illegal* immigrants also differ significantly between Arkansas residents who are well off financially and those who are struggling. Two-thirds of Arkansans who report being in fair or poor economic condition say that illegal immigrants take jobs Americans want, compared to only 49% of those who report being in good or excellent condition.

However, approximately 8-in-10 Arkansans in both economic groups believe that the American economy would benefit if illegal immigrants became taxpaying citizens (79% fair/poor and 81% good/excellent condition).

Half of Arkansas residents *disagree* that we should make a serious effort to deport all illegal immigrants, compared to 56% of Americans overall. Younger Arkansans (age 18 to 45) are significantly more likely than older Arkansans to oppose deportation (59% to 46%). Even among Arkansans who report being in fair or poor economic condition, less than half (49%) say they favor making a serious effort to deport all illegal immigrants.

## What Arkansans are Hearing in Church, Expect from Clergy

Like Americans overall, few Arkansans report hearing about the issue of immigration at their place of worship. Twenty-two percent, compared to 24% of all Americans, report hearing their clergy talk about the issue of immigration sometimes or often. Majorities of people in Arkansas who attend religious services regularly report being comfortable with their clergy leader speaking about immigration in a variety of settings: from the pulpit (53%), in their congregation's newsletter or website (63%), in an adult education session (74%), at a local community meeting (76%), or in the local media (77%). Nationally, religious Americans report similar levels of comfort with their clergy speaking about immigration in these settings.

## Re-Contact Survey Results

PRRI conducted a short re-contact survey March 31-April 5, 2010, with participants of the original survey that was fielded March 5-11, 2010. The purpose of the re-contact survey was to assess whether the passage of comprehensive health care reform on March 21, 2010, which occurred after the original survey field dates, had influenced public attitudes about the direction of the country or specifically about support for Congress tackling immigration reform this year.

In the re-contact survey, we found no significant shift in support for Congress tackling immigration reform this year either among Arkansans or Americans nationwide. The re-contact survey found that 48% of Arkansas residents agree that Congress can handle multiple issues simultaneously and that tackling immigration reform this year

will help avoid more serious problems in the future, and 45% say that Congress should stay focused on jobs this year and not attempt to pass immigration reform.

However, the re-contact survey did identify a significant increase in satisfaction with the direction of the country, compared to attitudes prior to the passage of health care reform. While 69% of Arkansans remain dissatisfied with the direction of the country, this represents a 10-point drop from dissatisfaction levels in the original survey (79%); the re-contact survey also found a significant 7-point increase (from 16% to 23%) in the number of Arkansans who said they are satisfied with the direction of the country. These shifts were consistent with increases in satisfaction among Americans overall as measured in the original and re-contact surveys.