

TO: Interested Parties

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

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

A new survey by Public Religion Research Institute finds broad support among Ohio 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 Ohio Context

A plurality (48%) of Ohioans approve of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president, an approval rating similar to all Americans (46%). However, an overwhelming majority of Ohio residents, like Americans overall, are strongly dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today (77% and 75% respectively).

Ohioans generally resemble Americans overall in terms of political affiliation and ideology. Roughly one-quarter (26%) identify as Republican, one-third identify as Democrat, and close to 4-in-10 (37%) identify as independent. Forty-three percent of identify politically as conservative, 34% identify as moderate, and 19% identify as liberal.

Ohio residents also report slightly higher levels of economic hardship than the general public. Half of all Ohioans 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

Ohioans generally agree with all Americans that the immigration system is broken or completely broken (56% each); only 5% say the system is generally working.

Ohioans report similar salience levels and degrees of knowledge about the immigration system as Americans generally. Forty-two percent of Ohio residents say the issue of immigration is very or extremely important to them personally, compared to 47% of Americans nationwide. Like Americans overall, approximately 7-in-10 (69%) of Ohio residents say they know a lot or some about the immigration process. Ohioans, however, are somewhat less likely than all Americans to report that they know a lot (15% vs. 25% respectively).

A majority (54%) of Ohio residents say it is difficult for immigrants to come to the U.S. legally today, compared to 6-in-10 Americans overall. Like the American public, Ohio residents are also much more likely to say the immigration process is more difficult today than in previous generations (35%) than to say it has become easier (21%).

Ohio residents, like Americans nationwide, are generally split about their views of the contributions of immigrants, although Ohio residents are slightly more likely to say immigrants are a burden on the country. A plurality (47%) say immigrants constitute a burden on the country by taking jobs and health care, compared to 41% who say immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents. Among all Americans, a plurality (45%) say that immigrants today strengthen the country, and 43% say immigrants are a burden to the country.

Ohio residents are more likely than Americans overall to believe that illegal immigrants take jobs American workers want. A majority (56%) agree that illegal immigrants take jobs American workers want, compared to less than half (48%) of all Americans.

Values and Support for Immigration Reform

Like their fellow Americans, Ohioans agree on the importance of a set of values to guide immigration reform and strongly support comprehensive immigration reform.

Ohioans agree with Americans nationwide about the most important values that should guide immigration reform. Like Americans overall, overwhelming majorities of Ohio residents say enforcing the rule of law and protecting national security (87%), ensuring fairness to taxpayers (80%), keeping families together (79%), and protecting the dignity of every person (78%) are very or extremely important values that should guide immigration reform.

Nearly 9-in-10 Ohio residents, like Americans overall, support an earned path to citizenship for illegal immigrants (85% and 86% respectively), one of the key provisions of comprehensive immigration reform.

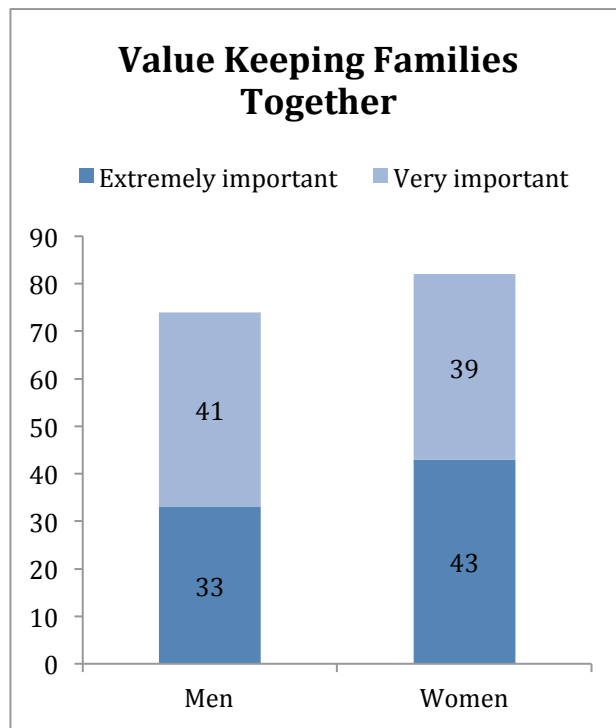
Like all Americans, Ohio residents favor comprehensive immigration reform over more limited enforcement-oriented alternatives by approximately 2-to-1. When asked to choose between a description of comprehensive reform and an argument that illegal immigrants should not be rewarded with amnesty or taxpayer-funded social services, 66% of Ohioans choose comprehensive reform with an earned path to citizenship, compared to 25% who embrace the opposing position—a 41-point margin. This margin of support is slightly larger than support among Americans nationwide, where 63% choose comprehensive reform, vs. 32% who embrace the opposing position—a 31-point margin.

Ohio residents are more likely than Americans overall to say that Congress should not tackle immigration reform this year (54% vs. 48% respectively), but they are more likely to respond to the problem of family separation than the general public. A majority (54%) of Ohio residents agree that Congress should stay focused on jobs and health care this year and not attempt to pass immigration reform. On the other hand, 42% agree that Congress can handle multiple issues simultaneously and that tackling immigration reform this year will help avoid more serious problems in the future—a margin of 12 points. When the description of tackling immigration reform this year includes language describing the problem of families being separated, this margin is reduced to 4 points, with 51% of Ohioans saying Congress should not tackle it this year and 47% disagreeing.

Gender Differences in Values and Support

Among all Americans, there are no significant gender differences in support for values that should guide immigration reform. Among Ohio residents, men and women also largely agree on the pragmatic-legal values that should guide immigration reform. Overwhelming majorities (87%) of both men and women in Ohio say that enforcing the rule of law and protecting national security is very or extremely important values for immigration reform.

However, there are some significant gender differences among Ohioans in support for cultural-religious values that should guide immigration reform. Women place a higher premium than men on the values of keeping families together and welcoming the stranger. More than 8-in-10 (82%) women say keeping families together is very or extremely important, compared to 74% of men. Likewise, nearly six-in-ten (57%) Ohio women say that welcoming the stranger is very or extremely important compared to just 50% of Ohio men.



Differences in Views by Economic Well-being and Educational Attainment

Ohio 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 Ohio residents who report being in good or excellent economic condition, a majority (52%) say immigrants today strengthen the country due to their hard work and talents. Among those who are doing less well, only 31% agree, and a majority (52%) 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.

However, more than 8-in-10 of Ohioans in both economic groups believe that the American economy would benefit if illegal immigrants became taxpaying citizens (83% fair/poor and 85% good/excellent).

The survey also found significant differences by educational attainment. Ohio residents with a college degree are much more likely to believe that immigrants benefit the country than those with a high school education or less. A majority (54%) of college-educated Ohio residents say immigrants today benefit the country because of their hard work and talents, compared to less than one-third (31%) of those with a high school education or less. A majority (51%) of Ohioans with a high school education or less support the deportation of illegal immigrants, a policy supported by only about 4-in-10 (43%) of college graduates. However, overwhelming majorities of both groups say making illegal immigrants tax-paying citizens would benefit the U.S. economy (82% and 79% respectively).

Ohio residents, like Americans nationwide, oppose a policy of deporting all illegal immigrants (55% and 56% respectively). Younger Ohio residents (age 18 to 45) are more likely to oppose deportation than older residents (63% to 49% respectively). Even among Ohioans who report being in fair or poor economic condition, less than half (46%) say they favor making a serious effort to deport all illegal immigrants.

What Ohio Residents are Hearing in Church, Expect from Clergy

Like Americans overall, few Ohio residents report hearing about immigration at their place of worship. Twenty-one percent of Ohioans, compared to 24% of Americans overall, report hearing their clergy talk about the issue of immigration sometimes or often. Majorities of Ohio residents who attend religious services regularly report being comfortable with their clergy leader speaking about immigration from the pulpit (57%), in an adult education session (79%), in a congregational newsletter or website (68%), at

a local community meeting (83%), or in the local media (81%). 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 Ohioans or Americans nationwide. Like the general public, Ohioans remain divided. The re-contact survey found that 48% percent of Ohio 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 50% 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 67% of Ohioans remain dissatisfied with the direction of the country, this represents a 10-point drop from dissatisfaction levels in the original survey (77%); the re-contact survey also found a significant 10-point increase (from 17% to 27%) in the number of Ohioans 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.