

FR: Robert P. Jones, CEO

RE: **Comprehensive and Non-Partisan Research on American's Views on Civility**

As you are preparing for President Obama's State of the Union address tonight, I wanted to bring to your attention to three recent non-partisan national surveys from Public Religion Research Institute, which polls Americans on the intersection of faith, culture and politics, that identified Americans' views on civility, a topic that will surely be discussed in the President's speech.

In totality, this set of publicly released polls are the ***most comprehensive data on civility, the moral state of the union, and who most Americans believe are responsible for the harsh tone in current political debates.***

Our research confirms that Americans believe our nation is divided, the tone is more negative than the past, and our politicians are not working well together. However, despite acknowledging Washington's lack of civility, Americans are themselves divided along ideological and even religious lines on who is to blame for and who contributes more to the uncivil atmosphere. And Americans even bring partisan lenses to arguments to fundamental debates about why civility matters.

Details from our polls are below. All of our findings are available for review and we are happy to provide further analysis of our findings for both on-record and for background purposes. **Please contact Adam Muhlendorf at (202) 265-3000; (202) 641-6216 (c); or adam@rabinowitzdorf.com for more information or to speak with me about our research.**

Americans say Republicans more often use violent political rhetoric than Democrats.

Source: PRRI Religion and Politics Tracking Poll, January 20-23, 2011.

- Significantly more Americans say Republicans (35%) are more likely than Democrats (23%) to use violent images or language in political debates. About one-in-four point the finger at both political parties.
- More than six-in-ten (62%) self-identified Democrats say Republicans more often use violent rhetoric, while only 45% of self-identified Republicans say Democrats more often employ violent images or language.
- Political Independents mirror the general population, with 31% saying Republicans, 23% saying Democrats, and about one-in-four (24%) saying both parties use violent images or language in political debates.
- Americans are more closely divided over whether liberals or conservatives more often use violent political rhetoric (33% vs. 27% respectively).

A slim majority of Americans believe harsh rhetoric contributed to the targeting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (24% a lot, 27% a little), 4-in-10 say it played no role at all.

Source: PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, January 13-16, 2011.

- Sixty-four percent of those identifying with the Tea Party and 57% of Republicans say the anti-government discourse did not at all contribute to targeting the Congresswoman, while about 7-in-10 Democrats believe it did (43% a lot, 28% a little).
- Nearly half (48%) of independents believe the harsh rhetoric contributed something (20% a lot, 28% a little), while over 4-in-10 (41%) say that the anti-government and violent language did not contribute to targeting the Congresswoman.

Even before Arizona shootings, most Americans saw lack of civility as a serious problem in our nation's politics.

Source: PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, November 5-8, 2010.

- More than 8-in-10 Americans say the lack of civil or respectful discourse in our political system is a very (49%) or somewhat (32%) serious problem.
- Democrats are more likely than Republicans (53% vs. 41%) to say the lack of civility is a very serious problem.

Only 1-in-5 give 'moral state of the union' high marks.

Source: PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, January 13-16, 2011.

- Only 22% of Americans say they would give the current 'moral state of the union' a grade of an "A" or a "B." Nearly 4-in-10 (37%) who give the country's moral climate low marks (a "D" or "F"), and 38% give it a "C."

Most Americans believe the nation is more politically divided than in the past.

Source: PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, November 5-8, 2010.

- Nearly six-in-ten (59%) Americans believe that people are more divided over politics than they used to be.
- Only four-in-ten (41%) say people are more divided over religion than in the past.

Twice as many Americans believe 2010 elections were more negative than positive compared to past elections.

Source: PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, November 5-8, 2010.

- Compared to past elections, 41% of Americans believe the 2010 election was generally more negative, while 22% believe they were more positive; 31% saw no differences.
- Self-identified Democrats were nearly twice as likely as Republicans to say that the election was more negative (51% vs. 26% respectively).

Most Americans believe politicians do not work well together.

Source: *PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, November 5-8, 2010.*

- Only one-in-five (21%) Americans believe national political leaders work well together to get things done despite differences.
- But Americans see people working across differences successfully at the local level. Two-thirds (66%) say people in their local communities work well together despite differences.

PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, conducted November 5-8, 2010

To read the full results and questionnaire, click here: <http://bit.ly/LackofCivilityMajorProblem>

PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll, conducted January 13-16, 2011

To read the full results and questionnaire, click here: <http://bit.ly/MoralSOTU>

PRRI Religion and Politics Tracking Poll, conducted January 20-23, 2011

To read the full results and questionnaire, click here: <http://bit.ly/ViolentRhetoric>

The surveys above were designed and conducted by Public Religion Research Institute. The PRRI/RNS Religion News Poll is conducted monthly by PRRI in partnership with Religion News Service. All surveys were based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Opinion Research Corporation among a random sample of adults 18 years of age or older living in private households in the continental United States. Sample sizes for each poll were as follows: November 5-8, 2010 (1,022); January 13-16, 2011 (1,006); and January 20-23, 2011 (1,006). The margin of error for each of the above surveys is +/- 3.0 percentage points.