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National Poll Identifies Southern Voters' Attitudes

Topics explored include economy, immigration, Obama

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (Jan. 20, 2011) – The Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society, together with Winthrop Rockefeller Institute, has released the initial findings of a national online poll. The poll reveals political and public policy views from both Southern and “non-Southern” states.

The 2010 Blair-Rockefeller Poll, created by four University of Arkansas political scientists, surveyed 3,406 individuals 18 years of age and older. The sample included 1,649 non-Hispanic whites, 825 African Americans and 932 Latinos. Geographically, 1,689 respondents reside in Southern states, and 1,717 reside in other “non-South” states.

The goal of the Blair-Rockefeller Poll is to look at social-cultural influences on political values, which include attitudes and behaviors of African Americans and Latinos in the South.

“Given the absence of accurate data on Southern politics as well as attitudes and trends among minority groups, the Blair-Rockefeller Poll is positioned to become the definitive source of accurate information about the region’s politics and policy, and particularly emphasizes the political attitudes of African Americans and Latinos,” said Todd Shields, director of the Blair Center.

The poll identifies attitudes and trends specifically regarding regional identification, religion, racism and discrimination, the national Tea Party, and health care. It reveals the level of support that under-pollled groups such as Southern whites, African Americans and Latinos have for issues such as gun control, abortion rights, gay marriage, global warming, the war in Afghanistan and unemployment.

“Not only does the Blair-Rockefeller Poll address topics that remain thoroughly understudied at the regional level, it will also have an immediate national impact as the likely cornerstone of scholarship about African Americans and Latinos living in the South

and in other parts of the country,” said Susan Dumas, director of programs at Winthrop Rockefeller Institute, a co-funder of the poll with the Blair Center.

The initial findings regarding government and public issues indicate that, overall, tougher immigration standards, limitations on gun purchases and extending unemployment benefits are the most important issues among respondents.

The findings show that only one-third of respondents approve of President Obama’s handling of his job.

Other findings addressed respondents’ outlook concerning their personal financial situation, that of their racial/ethnic group and the nation’s future. The majority of respondents do not have high expectations for what their financial future holds; in fact, most feel it will be about the same as it is now. Almost half of white respondents believe that their personal economic situation and that of the country will get worse in the near future.

The Blair-Rockefeller Poll findings also revealed respondents’ attitudes regarding race and ethnicity. Almost half of African Americans and Latinos reported that little attention is paid to race and racial issues today. In addition, African Americans are significantly more likely than whites and Latinos to report having experienced discrimination.

The Blair-Rockefeller Poll was conducted through the nationally representative online KnowledgePanel[®], which is based on a randomly selected sample of the entire U.S. population. Knowledge Networks, an Internet survey and market research company, selected households using random-digit dialing and address-based sampling methods. Once a person was recruited to participate in the panel, contact was limited to e-mail (no phone or mail). This method permits surveys to be fielded quickly and economically, according to Knowledge Networks.

“KnowledgePanel has become the standard for scholarly polling conducted online,” said Mike Dennis, executive vice president of Knowledge Networks. “We are delighted to be part of timely research on emerging changes in Southern political attitudes and voting behavior.”

About Winthrop Rockefeller Institute and the Blair Center

Winthrop Rockefeller Institute’s emphasis on education, public policy and economic development complements the mission of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society at the University of Arkansas. Working together, these two organizations – both part of the University of Arkansas System – are able to combine resources as well as the unique strengths associated with each organization’s staff to accomplish significantly more than either could acting alone.

In 2005, the University of Arkansas System established Winthrop Rockefeller Institute with a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Charitable Trust. By integrating the resources and expertise of a statewide university system with the legacy and ideas of former

Arkansas Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller, this educational institute and conference center creates an atmosphere where collaboration and change can thrive. The institute offers a variety of workshops, seminars, public lectures, conferences and special events. Program areas include agriculture and environment, arts and humanities, economic development, and policy and public affairs. For more information about the institute, visit LiveTheLegacy.org.

The Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society was established in 2001 by an act of U.S. Congress. The research center was named in memory of Diane Divers Blair, who taught in the political science department at the University of Arkansas for 30 years. The Blair Center reflects her academic standards and strives to approach the study of the American South from a variety of angles, attempting to reveal the undercurrents of politics, history and culture that have shaped the region over time. For more information about the Blair Center, visit blaircenter.uark.edu.

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