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Special New York State Immigration and Issues Poll

61% Oppose Muslim Cultural Center; But, Majority Willing to Listen *Small Majority Support Arizona Style Immigration Law for NY* NY'ers say Illegal Immigration a Problem; Call for Enhanced Border Security, Temp Worker Plan and Tough, Fair Path to Legalization

Loudonville, NY. By a margin of 61 to 26 percent, New Yorkers oppose the proposal to build the Cordoba House, a multi-story Muslim Cultural Center in lower Manhattan two blocks from the site of the World Trade Center according to a new survey released today from the Siena College Research Institute (SRI). New Yorkers have been following the new Arizona immigration law very closely and 52 percent support passing a similar law here in the Empire State. Seventy percent of New York residents say that the presence of 10 to 20 million illegal immigrants poses a somewhat (30%) or very significant (40%) problem to the U.S., and large majorities call for comprehensive immigration reform that would include enhanced border security (79%), the creation of a process for admitting legal temporary workers (70%), and implementing a tough but fair path to legalization for those already here (65%).

“Large majorities of all New Yorkers, every party, region and age give a thumbs-down to the Cordoba House Mosque being built near the Ground Zero site,” according to Dr. Don Levy, SRI’s Director. “But only just over half of all New Yorkers, even city residents say they have been following the news about the proposed mosque closely.”

“Two of ten New Yorkers agree more with supporters that say the proposed Cultural Center would demonstrate the presence of moderate Muslims and serve as a monument to religious tolerance than with opponents that say the project is an offense to the memory of those killed in the attacks on 9/11 and that it displays unacceptable insensitivity. Nearly four in ten agree more with the opponents and 38 percent think both sides have a legitimate case. Over half of all New Yorkers and NYC residents either agree that the project would promote tolerance or are, at least, willing to listen.”

“But when it comes to a yes or no vote, more than a quarter of those that agree with the supporters, nearly half of those that see both sides and virtually all of those that question the appropriateness of the Mosque currently vote ‘No’ on the project,” according to Levy.

Over three quarters of all New Yorkers have been following the news about immigration reform and border security at least somewhat closely, and 70 percent think the presence of illegal immigrants is a significant problem. Fifty-seven percent of New Yorkers are in favor of requiring people to produce documents verifying that they are in the U.S. legally but other provisions of the new Arizona Law receive pluralities not majorities from New Yorkers. Overall, 49 percent support the Arizona Law and 44 percent oppose it.

“New Yorkers are divided on the Arizona Immigration Law. Nearly a quarter think the provisions in the law that call for police to detain anyone unable to verify their legal status and to question anyone about their immigration status upon any lawful stop, is right and proper while thirteen percent don’t think the law goes far enough and nearly one third disagree and say it goes too far,” Levy notes.

“One fourth of residents agree that the law is necessary to combat a list of problems caused by illegal immigration and the fact that the federal government has failed to secure the borders, while a nearly equal percentage argue that the law will lead to racial profiling and that it will negatively affect the rights of individuals. Nearly half of New Yorkers see wisdom in both of these viewpoints,” according to Levy.

A small majority, 52 percent support a similar immigration law for New York while 45 percent oppose it. Support is greatest among Republicans, Upstaters and Suburbanites while opposition is greatest among New York City residents, Hispanics, African-Americans and Democrats. Of those that support the hypothetical immigration law for New York, a quarter would be very upset if it were not passed but among those that oppose it, two-thirds indicate that they would be very upset if an Arizona style law passed in New York.

Fifty-six percent of New Yorkers call for immigration reform to come from, and be regulated and enforced by the federal government. But currently, 65 percent say the U.S. is not very or not at all effective in keeping illegal immigrants from coming into this country and by 42 to 37 percent New Yorkers disapprove of the way President Obama is handling immigration.

“New Yorkers want and support comprehensive immigration reform. By seventy-nine to five percent they call for enhancing border security, by seventy to thirteen percent they support a legal temporary worker program and by sixty-five to eighteen percent a tough but fair path to legalization. Fifty percent of New Yorkers even support a biometric Social Security card. Still despite support for many of the aspects of a bill, as we all know, the devil still lies in the details,” Levy comments.

This SRI survey was conducted July 27-29 and August 2-3, 2010 by telephone calls to 622 New York State residents. It has a margin of error of ± 3.9 percentage points. Data was statistically adjusted by age, gender, and self-identified race to ensure representativeness. For more information, pdf of the release and cross tabulations, visit: www.siena.edu/sri/research.