

# **The 2010 Election Aiken County Exit Poll: A Descriptive Analysis**

A public service research report  
co-sponsored by the

USCA History and Political Science Department  
and the  
USCA Social Science and Business Research Lab

Robert Botsch, Professor of Political Science and SSR Lab Director  
Patrick Long, Research Assistant

December 2, 2010

All conclusions in this report are solely those of the authors  
and do not represent any position or opinion of the University of South Carolina Aiken.

## Executive Summary

Every election year students in the political science research methods class at USC Aiken perform an exit poll of Aiken County voters. Students surveyed 758 voters in ten precincts that represented all major areas of the county with a response rate of 78%. Sampling error on any question answered by all respondents is plus or minus four percentage points. Following the survey students write individual research papers testing hypotheses. In addition, they jointly author a research report highlighting major findings in the survey with the editorial assistance of the professor, Dr. Robert Botsch. The major findings of this survey are highlighted in this summary. Details and analysis are in the report that follows.

Turnout. Turnout among registered voters in 2010 was higher than in the 2006 election, but 24 percentage points lower than in 2008 presidential election. Differences in who turned out significantly boosted the normal Republican advantage.

The Governor's Election. Republican Nikki Haley had broad based support across the county, running ten percentage points ahead of her state total of 51%. She won nearly nine in ten votes among the 55% of all voters who either leaned toward Republicans or who were strong Republicans.

The Tea Party Movement. Tea Party supporters comprised 43% of all voters in the county, a slightly higher proportion of voters than across the nation in 2010. Supporters were very distrustful of government, strongly conservative, Republican, and almost exclusively white. Tea Party Republicans were significantly more conservative than non Tea Party Republicans.

The County Government Office Complex. A slight majority of voters preferred keeping the present county office complex on Richland Avenue than rebuilding it. Those preferring keeping the complex were more likely to be Tea Party supporters, were older, and may be less well informed, being less likely to read a daily newspaper.

Extending Income Tax Cuts. By a ratio of five to three, voters preferred extending the tax cuts on all income rather than only on the first \$250,000 in income. Tea Party supporters and non supporters had opposing opinions on this issue, with supporters strongly favoring a blanket extension and most non supporters favoring the extension on only the first \$250,000 in income.

Do the Unemployed Want to Work. More than two thirds of all voters believed that unemployed people would take jobs if they were available. Those most likely to feel that the unemployed do not really try to find jobs were Tea Party supporters and Republicans.

School Vouchers for private schools. Voters were evenly divided between those who believed a school voucher system would improve education by providing more competition and those who felt that vouchers would take money away from public schools. Tea Party supporters strongly favored vouchers, while non supporters opposed vouchers.

The role of government in health care. A plurality of voters (42%) wanted government to make sure that everyone has at least minimal access to health care. Just over a third preferred a free market approach, and the remaining 19% preferred the current system in which government only insures care for limited groups of people, such as the old and disabled. Tea Party supporters strongly favored the free market approach while non supporters preferred a greater government role. As family income decreased, support for a greater government role increased.

Abortion. Only one in five voters took a strict pro life position. Two in five were strictly pro choice, and the remaining two in five supported abortion in limited circumstances. Religious fundamentalists were more likely to take a pro life position (37%), but even among this group, relatively more chose one of the other two positions that would allow abortion. Women and those with more education were more likely to take the pro choice position than men or those with less education.

Social Security. More than four in five voters (84%) wanted to keep Social Security and only make changes that are necessary to insure that it is financially sound. Support was broad as well as deep. We could not find any demographic or political group that preferred to phase out the program and replace it with voluntary savings. Even three-fourths of the Tea Party supporters who generally oppose government programs favored mending rather than ending Social Security.

Government Spending: Stimulus Versus Cuts. A majority of Aiken voters (55%) said they would prefer cutting spending to reduce deficits even if that meant major cuts in programs rather than the government running deficits to try and save jobs and stimulate the economy. Tea Party supporters were most in favor of cuts. Voters with lower family incomes who are most vulnerable to job loss and in need of government help tended to favor government spending.

Blame for Economic Woes. Voters tended affix blame for the economic woes facing the nation according to party identification. Republicans blamed Obama, Democrats blamed Bush, and independents split almost evenly on whom to blame. Overall voters were roughly evenly split, with a little over a third blaming Obama, a little under a third blaming Bush, one in five blaming both and one in ten blaming neither.

Irritation with Hispanic Immigration. We asked voters if they were irritated when they hear people speaking Spanish in public places. Overall, just over half said “no,” a fourth said “yes,” and the remainder said “sometimes.” Whites, Tea Party supporters, and religious fundamentalists were most likely to say they feel irritation at least sometimes.

Constitutional Issues: Religious Test for Office and Censorship. Voters were rather evenly divided on whether a candidate’s religion was important in making voting decisions. It was most important for self-identified religious fundamentalists. More than three out of four fundamentalists said that a candidate’s religion was moderately or very important. On the issue of censorship, by a five to four margin, voters supported removing a book from the public library if it was written by someone favoring terrorism. Again, religious fundamentalists were the group most likely to favor this kind of censorship with more than three out of four taking this position.

President Obama’s Religion. More than one in four voters continued to believe the myth that President Obama is really a Muslim. This compares to one in five adults nationally. This belief was almost exclusively found among whites, with more than one in three holding this belief. Almost half of Tea Party supporters and nearly three in five white fundamentalists held this belief.

Compromise Across Party Lines. Despite all the talk about polarization and ideological purity, nearly three out of four Aiken County voters said they prefer legislators who are willing to compromise with members of the other party rather than legislators who stand strictly by party principles. This preference was widespread, shared among all identifiable groups, including even Tea Party supporters and strong partisans on both sides.

Political Trust and Divided Government. More than two thirds of Aiken County voters said that they trust either state or national government only “some of the time.” Relatively low levels of trust may explain why the majority (55%) said they would prefer to have a different political party control at least one house in Congress rather than having one party control the White House and both houses of Congress.

## **Introduction**

Students in Dr. Robert E. Botsch's Political Science Research Methods class performed an exit poll of Aiken County voters in the November 2, 2010 general election. The sample is representative of the voters who participated in the election, as explained in the methodology section below.

In the weeks to come, students will be testing hypotheses and writing research papers on their findings. Hopefully, as in the past, some of these papers will be presented at academic conferences and even published.

Presented below are descriptions and some initial analysis of the opinions and preferences of Aiken County voters. The initial draft of this report was co-authored by students in the class. In the report we place particular emphasis on the Tea Party movement and those who said they support the movement because this movement has received so much attention for the impacts it has had both on the primaries and general election of 2010.

## **Methodology**

The exit poll included voters chosen systematically from ten precincts that represented all areas of the county (the cities of Aiken, North Augusta, the Midland Valley area, and rural areas) and that had in the past reflected the county-wide vote. Voters were sampled during two time periods, first starting at 7:30 am and then again at 11:00. Each voter was handed a two-sided questionnaire on a clipboard, which they filled out themselves and then folded and placed in a "ballot box" to help insure anonymity. An equal number of clipboards were designated as "male" and "female" clipboards so that both genders were equally sampled. After each interview was completed, students approached the next available male or female leaving the polls for the subsequent interview. The response rate was 78%, meaning that more than three of every four voters approached by students completed the survey. The sampling error for questions answered by all respondents is plus or minus four percentage points.

Dr. Botsch's classes have been performing exit polls since the early 1980s. This year the student/interviewers were Michael Bond, Chelsea Bratton, Vaneesha Brewton, Lauren Cholar, Clayton Clarkson, Mattie Davis, Sequoia Francois-Frazier, Chanel Garland, Kin Hair, Taneris Hill, Michael Johnson, Emily Keep, Colen Lindall, Zach Moulton, Ralph Prioleau, Scott Saylor, Katie Scott, Oshwand Scott, Jonathan Shaw, Brittany Storey, and Ryan Treat. Patrick Long provided invaluable help in supervising interviewers on Election Day as well as in data cleaning and loading. Questions about

this research should be directed to Robert E. Botsch, Professor of Political Science at USCA.

## Turnout

A tried and true statement among campaign experts is that “turnout is everything.” Turnout in this off-presidential year state and national election was much lower than in the presidential election of 2008. In 2008 the percentage of registered voters who actually voted was 77%. In 2010 the percentage was 53%, 24 percentage points lower. However, turnout in presidential years like 2008 is always higher than turnout in non-presidential years like 2010. Perhaps a better comparison is 2006, when 47% of the registered voters in the county actually voted, six points lower than in 2010. We might conclude that turnout in 2010 was relatively high for Aiken County for a non-presidential year.

However, we should note that none of these turnout figures are impressive given that not every potentially eligible adult registers to vote. Turnout figures for the total adult population would be quite a bit lower.

While many factors explain low turnout, one factor is the lack of serious competition between the two political parties in the county and across the state as a whole. That Republicans will win is almost a foregone conclusion in countywide and statewide election.

Even more important than percentage turnout is exactly who turns out to vote. Generally speaking, the lower the turnout, the better Republicans do. This is because Republicans are more likely to have demographic characteristics that promote voting, such as higher education and higher income.

From our general population telephone survey performed in 2009, we know that the total adult population over 18 years of age is 35% Democrat and 44% Republican, producing a net Republican advantage of nine percentage points. But the division among actual voters in 2010 was 30% Democrat and 53% Republican. The nine point advantage ballooned to 23 percentage points because Democrats are less likely to register, and then if they do register, they are less likely to vote. That voting difference was slightly larger in 2010 than in 2008, when the GOP advantage among Aiken County voters was difference was 21 percentage points.

Several factors account for these differences in addition to the usual demographics. Republicans benefitted from an “enthusiasm gap” that existed across the nation, including Aiken County. Both black and white Democrats lacked enthusiasm in voting. The proportion of African-Americans among voters in Aiken County dropped off several points from the 2008 election and was several points lower than their overall proportion of the population (25%). But white Democrats did not turn out in 2010 either. While 17%

of all whites identified as Democrats across the county in 2009, white Democrats only comprised 13% of all 2010 voters according to our exit poll.

Given the partisan imbalance in Aiken County, Democrats cannot become competitive in the foreseeable future even if they do turn out at the same rate as Republicans. However, the 2010 turnout trends did doom a few select statewide Democrats such as gubernatorial candidate Vincent Sheheen and State Superintendent of Education candidate Frank Holleman. They might have won had Democrats turned out across the state in proportions closer to the 2010 election.

### **Governor's Election**

Aiken County voters overwhelmingly supported Republican Nikki Haley by a margin of 26 percentage points, giving her 62% as opposed to 36% for Democrat Vincent Sheheen. That is considerably higher than the just over 51% she garnered statewide, where she trailed most other GOP statewide candidates.

Haley's support was wide as well as deep. She received heavy support from those who said they supported the Tea Party movement in Aiken County, winning 94% of their votes. The strong Republican base in the county (53% of all voters at least leaned in the Republican direction) remained loyal to their party's nominee, giving her 91% of their votes. She won 57% of the independents, whose support any Democrat must win if they are to have any chance in winning the county. Haley also did extremely well among those who consider themselves conservatives, winning 89% of their votes. Haley won 75% of the white vote. She did slightly better among men than women, winning 66% of the male vote as opposed to 58% of the female vote.

### **The Tea Party**

One of the most important factors in the 2010 primary elections and the general election was the Tea Party movement. We asked Aiken County voters about their support for the Tea Party in the following question:

*Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement?*

Nationally about 30% of all adults and 40% of all voters in the 2010 election said they were supporters of the Tea Party, according to a November 2010 telephone poll conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications and the national 2010 election exit poll. The national polls found that Tea Party supporters were almost all white, highly conservative, and two-thirds of them were Republican. They were more likely to be older affluent males.

We found a similar picture among Aiken County voters. Voters who supported the Tea Party comprised 43% of the electorate in Aiken County, about the same proportion as in the nation. They were 98% white. More than eight in ten were Republicans. Nine in ten Tea Party supporters self-identified as conservatives. Tea Party supporters were significantly more likely to be male than female, at about a six to four ratio. Nearly three in five self-identified as religious fundamentalists. They were had significantly higher family incomes. Supporters' average age was were two years older than non supporters, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Supporters were characterized by a level of distrust of the national government that was more than three times higher than non-supporters. At the same time supporters were more likely than non-supporters to feel high levels of personal effectiveness in politics. This suggests that the combination of distrust and a sense of personal effectiveness in politics was a significant motivation for supporting this new political movement. Political scientists have identified this combination of attitudes as being associated with non-conventional activist and sometimes extreme political behavior.

The Republican Party was dominated by those who support the Tea Party with nearly two of every three Republicans saying they were Tea Party supporters. Tea Party Republicans were almost twice as likely to see themselves as strong conservatives as non Tea Party Republicans (78% and 41% respectively). Non Tea Party Republicans, on the other hand, were more than twice as likely to self-identify as "leaning" in the conservative direction or as "middle of the road" in ideology. Clearly Tea Party Republicans and non Tea Party Republicans represent two different wings within the party, with the Tea Party group dominant among Aiken County Republican voters in the 2010 election.

### **Aiken County Government Complex**

The proposed rebuilding of Aiken County Government Complex has been in the news recently. We asked voters the following question:

*Much debate exists on whether Aiken County should continue to use the county government complex located in the old hospital building in Richland Avenue or replace it with a more modern facility at the same site. How do you feel?*

*Use the existing facility: 54% (375)*

*Replace it with a modern facility: 35% (243)*

*I have not thought about this: 11% (74)*

A slight majority favored keeping the present complex, but the fact that more than one in ten voters said they had not thought about this issue suggests that these opinions are not very strong and might be changed with additional information.

Tea Party supporters comprised a majority of those wanting to keep the present complex, a position consistent with their general philosophy of minimizing government expenditures. Those wanting to keep the present complex were also significantly older and less likely to read a daily newspaper than those wanting to replace the complex. This suggests that opponents may be less well informed and might have their opinions changed if they had more information.

### Extending Income Tax Cuts

One of the most talked about issues in the campaign were whether or not to extend the tax cuts put in place by the Bush administration beyond 2011 when they were scheduled to end. We asked voters to choose among the three options that were on the political table.

*Which of the following best fits your views on the income tax cuts that are scheduled to end in 2011?*

*Extend the existing tax cuts for everyone: 49% (351)*

*Extend tax cuts for the first \$250,000 of everyone's income, but not for income over that: 30% (214)*

*Let the tax cuts end for everyone: 10% (73)*

*I have not had time to think about this: 10% (67)*

Voters said they preferred to extend all the income tax cuts on all taxable income for everyone rather than just on the first \$250,000 in taxable income by a ratio of five to three. One in ten voters either wanted to end all tax cuts and the remaining ten percent had no opinion.

The relatively high percentage of voters with no opinion on an issue that both parties stressed in their campaigns along with comments our interviewers heard from voters suggest that a significant number of voters were confused about the policy choices. Many appear to have wrongly believed that the Obama administration's proposal was that no one with taxable incomes over \$250,000 would keep any tax cut. In fact, everyone would retain existing cuts on all taxable income up to \$250,000. Only the tax cuts on taxable income over \$250,000 would be ended. Any confusion on this important issue rests on a very poor communication effort from Democrats and the White House.

Tea Party supporters were heavily in favor of extending the cuts on all income (77%), while only a little over a third of non-supporters wanted a blanket extension (37%). Non-supporters' most preferred option was extending the cut on only the first \$250,000 in income (50%).

Support for extending the tax cuts increased with family income. Those wanting the tax cuts extended for all income had significantly higher family incomes than those wanting the cuts extended on only the first \$250,000 in income. And those preferring ending all tax cuts had significantly lower family incomes than those wanting cuts on only the first \$250,000 in income.

### **View of the Unemployed**

Because unemployment has been a major concern in South Carolina, we asked voters about their views on the unemployed.

*Unemployment has been a major concern lately. Which comes closest to your view?*

<i>Most unemployed people want to work and would take a</i>	
<i>job if it were available:</i>	68% (474)
<i>Most unemployed people could find a job if they really tried:</i>	30% (207)
<i>I have not had time to think about this:</i>	3% (20)

Two-thirds of all voters saw the issue of unemployment as quite real and not the product of people who just do not want to work. Unemployment is an issue that is quite visible to most people in South Carolina where unemployment is higher than most states. Very few had not thought about this issue.

Tea Party supporters were more likely to blame unemployment on the unemployed. More than half of those saying that people would find work if they really tried were Tea Party supporters (56%). More than three in five of those who said that people would take jobs if they were available were not Tea Party supporters (62%).

Opinions also varied by political party. Of those who had opinions on this issue, Republicans were far more likely than Democrats to blame unemployment on the unemployed (41% and 14% respectively).

### **School Vouchers**

Whether to have a voucher system that includes private schools has been a long-standing issue in South Carolina. Vouchers could have been a major issue in the governor's race if Republican Nikki Haley had taken the strong pro-voucher position that she had taken in the past. Rather, she chose to take a somewhat softer position, saying that she would not push for a voucher system, but rather would be willing to sign into law a voucher system if the legislature presented her with such a bill. We asked voters a question about vouchers, taking what is called a "balanced argument" approach in the question. We gave the strongest argument on either side of the issue, and let the voters choose.

Which is closer to your view on a school voucher system that helps people pay for private schools?

A voucher system would hurt public schools by taking  
money away from them: 41% (304)

A voucher system would be good for education by  
creating more competition: 41% (309)

I have not had time to think about this: 18% (134)

Voters were evenly divided on the issue of school vouchers, with 41% taking each side and about one in five they had no opinion. The high percentage of voters with no opinion suggest that this was not a very important issue in the campaign—Haley’s tactical shift on the issue may have worked. The division in opinion on this issue has not changed very much since the last governor’s election in 2006 when our exit poll also found Aiken County voters evenly divided.

Strong majorities of Tea Party supporters and non Tea Party supporters were on opposite sides of this issue. Nearly two-thirds of all Tea Party supporters said they supported vouchers (66%) while almost three of four of the non supporters opposed vouchers (72%).

### **Role of Government in Health Care**

Anger over the increasing role of the government in the health care reform bill was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Tea Party movement. We asked voters a question about what they thought the proper role of government should be in health care.

Which comes closest to your view on health care?

Government should make sure that everyone has at least  
minimal access to health care: 42% (295)

Government should only provide health care for the elderly,  
children, and the disabled: 19% (135)

The free market should control health care with minimal  
government regulation: 36% (250)

I have not had time to think about this issue: 3% (17)

A plurality of voters chose the option that had more government involvement, not less involvement. However, only one in ten Tea Party supporters chose that option (10%), while more than seven in ten non Tea Party supporters chose that option (73%). Tea Party supporters strongly preferred the free market approach (60%), while only a

little over one in ten non Tea Party supporters preferred the free market approach (12%).

Family income was strongly related to views on the proper role of government in health care. As income rose, support for the free market approach rose and support for government guaranteeing access to all fell. Opinions on this issue seem to be a matter of economic self-interest. A majority of those who clearly could afford health care in the private market preferred the private market, and a majority of those who may have problems in paying for private insurance preferred government to play a larger role.

## Abortion

Abortion has long been one of the most contentious issues in American politics. We asked Aiken voters about the issue, providing them with three choices, a clear pro life position, a clear pro choice position, and a middle position that would allow abortions under certain conditions.

*Which opinion on abortion best fits your views on when the law should permit abortions?*

*Abortion should never be permitted: 20% (135)*

*Only in cases of rape, incest or when the mother or fetus has very serious health issues: 38% (256)*

*Abortion should be completely a woman's personal choice: 40% (271)*

*I have not had time to think about this: 3% (17)*

Voters who chose the pro choice position outnumbered the pro life voters by a ratio of two to one. This is somewhat surprising for a very conservative area like Aiken County. Only one in five voters took the pro life position. However, what usually makes up for lack in numbers is the intensity of pro life voters. They are often single issue voters, while pro choice voters and those taking the middle ground position feel much less intense on this issue.

Religious fundamentalists were far more likely to be pro life (37%) than pro choice (16%). But fundamentalists were even more likely take the middle ground position (45%). Non-fundamentalists were most heavily pro choice (52%).

While Tea Party supporters were almost evenly divided between pro life and pro choice (25% to 22%), those who did not support the non Tea Party were heavily more pro choice (61%) than pro life (12%). Most Tea Party supporters took the middle ground position (51%).

Men and women were equally likely to be pro life (20% each), but women were far more likely to be pro choice than men (48% versus 31%).

While age made no significant difference, education had a significant relationship to voters' positions on abortion. Pro life voters had the lowest average number of years of completed education (13.7) while pro choice voters had the highest average number of years of completed education (15.2). Those taking the middle position were in between the other two groups in education (14.7 years completed).

## Social Security

The Social Security program is the largest and most successful social welfare program in the history of the United States. Over the decades since its enactment in the 1930s, it has played a very significant role in transforming the elderly from the poorest age group to the most well off. Recipients feel a sense of ownership and entitlement because they contribute to the program (a feature that Franklin Roosevelt insisted be built into the program). However, because most draw far more than they put into the program, it is more correctly seen as an intergenerational income transfer program. The major problems the program faces are twofold. First, people are living longer and drawing far more benefits. Second, the ratio of those in the program to those working and paying for it has dramatically shifted as baby boomers retire. We asked voters what they felt should be done.

*Which comes closer to your view on Social Security?*

*Social Security should be kept and only make those  
changes to make it financially sound: 84% (568)*

*Social Security should be phased out and replaced by  
voluntary savings: 12% (79)*

*I have not had time to think about this: 4% (29)*

By overwhelming margins, Aiken County voters clearly preferred keeping the program and only making changes necessary to make it financially sound. Even Tea Party supporters prefer this option (76% to 21%), despite the fact that Social Security can be seen as a socialist style program in which the government is heavily involved in income transfer between age groups.

We could find no age group that preferred voluntary savings. Even the 18-25 age group preferred a financially sound Social Security system over voluntary savings (61% to 21% respectively).

Though liberals were more supportive of keeping Social Security than conservatives, even conservatives strongly preferred keeping Social Security over voluntary savings (76% to 19% respectively).

## Government Spending: Stimulus Versus Cuts

Another issue that was very important in the 2010 election was the proper role of government in trying to improve the economy and the related concern over ballooning deficits. We asked voters which direction they would prefer the government to take, with the reality that either direction imposes costs.

*Which comes closer to your view on government and the economy?*

*Government should be willing to run deficits to try to  
save jobs and stimulate the economy: 37% (243)*

*Government should cut spending to reduce deficits even  
if that means major cuts in public services: 55% (363)*

*I have not had time to think about this issue: 9% (58)*

A clear majority of voters chose the option that would reduce deficits even if that meant cuts in services. Of course this hypothetical question might produce different results if we knew exactly what services would be cut.

Tea Party supporters and those who said they did not support the movement were on opposite sides of this issue. Nearly nine in ten of the Tea Party supporters (85%) chose the deficit reduction option, while nearly three in five (58%) of the non supporters preferred to have government stimulating the economy.

Preferences on this question changed with family income and can be explained by economic self interest. As family income rose, preference for fighting deficits increased. As income fell, preference for stimulating the economy and trying saving jobs increased. Those who were most vulnerable to the economic downturn were more likely to look to government action for help. Those who were economically more secure and less in need of help worried more about deficits.

## Blame for Nation's Economic Woes

The economy played a major role in the 2010 election. Generally, voters tend to hold the party which holds the White House responsible for the state of the economy. Political scientists call this "retrospective voting." However, to the extent that President Obama and the Democrats could lay the blame for the recession at the feet of President Bush, they may have been able to avoid the wrath of voters. We asked voters which president should be held responsible.

*Who do you feel is relatively more to blame for our current economic problems?*

<i>Bush:</i>	31%	(216)
<i>Obama:</i>	38%	(269)
<i>Both:</i>	20%	(141)
<i>Neither:</i>	9%	(66)
<i>Not sure:</i>	2%	(15)

Blame fell according to party lines. Republicans tended to blame Obama (60%). Democrats blamed Bush (87%). Independents were rather evenly split with about a fourth blaming each president and just over a third blaming both equally. Political scientists have long observed that party serves as a psychological filter through which partisans see the world. Such appears to have been the case on this question.

Tea Party supporters and non-supporters also split in opposing majorities. Supporters blamed Obama (64%) and non-supporters blamed Bush (61%).

## Irritation with Hispanic Immigration

Another issue that has been important in recent years is the question of illegal immigration and what should and can be done about it. Because many of those who illegally enter the U.S. have been of Hispanic origin, some of the negative feelings concerning illegal immigration may have created irritation with the growing Hispanic influence in American life. We asked a question that might tap some of this irritation.

*Do you get irritated when you hear people speaking Spanish in public places like stores or parks?*

<i>Yes:</i>	25%	(170)
<i>Sometimes:</i>	22%	(150)
<i>No:</i>	53%	(356)

Voters are roughly divided between those who never feel irritation (53%) and those who at least sometimes feel irritation (47%: 25% plus 22%).

Tea Party supporters were almost twice as likely as non supporters to express at least some irritation (57% and 34% respectively). Religious fundamentalists were also

almost twice as likely as non-fundamentalists to say they feel irritation at least sometimes (65% versus 38%). Native southerners were more than twice as likely to express this irritation as those who self-identified as non-Southerners (50% and 34% respectively). Finally, whites were more likely than blacks to feel irritated at least sometimes (50% versus 37%).

### **Constitutional Issues: Religious Test for Office and Censorship**

We asked about two constitutional issues. First we asked about voters' willingness to use religious identification as a test for voting for someone for office, which might be seen as contrary to the spirit of the constitutional prohibition of having any religious test for office (Article VI). Second, we asked about removing books written by disliked groups in public libraries, which might be seen as in violation of first amendment rights and free and open discussion in society.

*How important is a candidate's religion to you in making a voting choice?*

<i>Not at all important:</i>	32% (223)
<i>Slightly important:</i>	21% (147)
<i>Moderately important:</i>	21% (146)
<i>Extremely important:</i>	27% (189)

Voters were rather evenly divided across all four options on this question. About a third of all voters (32%) were unwilling to do privately in their own personal voting decisions what the Constitution prohibits to be done by law. Another fifth (21%) felt that religion only had a slight impact. The remaining 48% saw religion as being either moderately or extremely important in their voting decisions.

Those most likely to view the religion of a candidate as moderately or extremely important were religious fundamentalists (78%), Tea Party supporters (58%), native southerners (57%), Republicans (57%), conservatives (55%), and African-Americans (53%). Education had an impact on answers to this question. As education increased, voters were less likely to take into account the religion of a candidate in their voting choice.

*Suppose a person who favors terrorism against the U.S. writes a book that is critical of the U.S. If this book was in the local public library, would you favor removing it or not.*

*Remove: 50% (334)*

*Not remove: 43% (286)*

*Do not know 8% (53)*

Questions similar to this are often used by political scientists to get a measure of commitment to civil liberties. While Americans are strongly supportive of civil liberties in the abstract, but when asked about protecting the rights of some group that they particularly dislike, support falls. This “least liked group” approach has used different groups over the years. In the 1950s communists were the least liked group, and citizens were quite willing to deny them basic first amendment rights of such things as free expression. Today, when people are no longer as fearful of communists, citizens are more willing to protect their rights. Those who are supportive of terrorism may be the “most disliked group” in 2010.

Half of all Aiken County voters in 2010 favored censorship of a book written by someone associated with terrorism. We see a similar pattern to what we saw on the candidate’s religion question. Those most likely to support censorship in the form of book removal were religious fundamentalists (77%), Tea Party supporters (56%), native southerners (56%), Republicans (57%), conservatives (55%), and African-Americans (61%). Again, education played a role. The likelihood of wanting to remove such books decreased with increasing years of education. Age also played a role here, with older voters being more likely to support removal.

### **President Obama’s Religion**

One of the most persisting myths in contemporary is the belief that President Barack Obama is a Muslim. We asked about this in the following question:

*Do you believe, as some people do, that Barack Obama is really a Muslim?*

*Yes: 28% (197)*

*No: 52% (361)*

*Not Sure: 20% (142)*

Nearly one in three voters believe that President Obama is really a Muslim. In the late summer of 2010 a Pew Center poll of all Americans found that nearly one in five Americans (19%) share this myth. That study found the belief was more likely to be embraced by Republicans and those critical of the president’s performance. Therefore we should not be surprised that in heavily Republican Aiken County the percentage having this belief is about ten percentage points higher than across the nation.

This myth was restricted almost entirely to white voters in Aiken County. Only three percent of non whites share this belief. Among whites, more than one in three (35%)

have this belief. This belief is most prevalent among native white Southerners (40%), Tea Party supporters (45%), strong Republicans (48%), and white religious fundamentalists (58%). That this myth is so widely held by religious fundamentalists is particularly relevant here because they were the group most likely to say that they would apply a religious test for office in their voting decisions (78%).

Whites who held this factually incorrect belief shared other characteristics. They were significantly less educated, had a significantly lower family income, and significantly less likely to read a daily newspaper or get news off the internet. They were slightly more likely to get news from television, though the difference was not quite statistically significant, missing the conventional threshold by one percentage point.

### **Political Process Part One: Compromise**

Much has been said by commentators and members of the media about the polarization of the nation into warring ideological factions who have little interest in working with each other, who would rather have nothing if they cannot get what they want. Both those on the far left and far right attack compromise. For example, President Obama has been severely criticized from the far left. They felt he should have stood firm for a single provider health care system instead of keeping private sector health insurance firms as the major providers for health care insurance. They felt he should have fought harder for a larger economic stimulus. Those on the far right have criticized Republicans who were willing to negotiate and compromise with the president on almost anything, labeling these compromisers as “RINO’s,” Republicans In Name Only. Did Aiken County voters fit this picture of warring ideologues who reject any compromise with the other side?

*Which would you more prefer?*

*Legislators who are willing to work with and  
compromise with members of the other party: 73% (514)*  
*Legislators who stand strictly by their party  
principles and refuse to compromise: 21% (147)*

*I have not had time to think about this: 6% (39)*

Nearly three-fourths of Aiken County voters say they prefer compromise while only one in five take a position that fits the hard line extremist picture we hear so much about in the media.

This preference for compromise was widespread. Even though Tea Party supporters were more likely to want ideological purity than non supporters (35% and 9% respectively), even a clear majority of Tea Party supporters said they prefer legislators who are willing to compromise (62%). The picture for strong Republicans was almost precisely the same. While strong Republicans were more likely to prefer standing by

strict party principles (35%) than those who “leaned” in the Republican direction (16%), a clear majority preferred compromise (62%). Strong Democrats were even more supportive of compromise (77%). Independents were the most supportive of compromise with 90% preferring legislators who work across party lines.

This is a far different picture than we often see in the media, where seemingly partisans with the loudest voices demanding ideological purity get the most coverage. Voters are far different. At least in principle they would seem to want legislators who are willing to come and reason together.

### **Political Process Part Two: Distrust and Divided Government**

Another picture we have of voters in 2010 is one based on distrust and anger—distrust of nearly all government and the two parties that attempt to organize government so that it can take action in a coherent way, and anger that government has not solved major problems. Such distrustful and angry voters might prefer that neither party have complete control over the national government. They might prefer what political scientists call “divided government.”

We asked about distrust of state and national government and about whether voters preferred “divided” government.

*How much of the time do you think you can trust S. C.’s government to do what is right?*

<i>Just about always:</i>	1%	(9)
<i>Most of the time:</i>	18%	(125)
<i>Some of the time</i>	69%	(470)
<i>Never:</i>	8%	(53)
<i>Not sure:</i>	3%	(22)

*How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?*

<i>Just about always:</i>	3%	(22)
<i>Most of the time:</i>	10%	(70)
<i>Some of the time:</i>	68%	(478)
<i>Never:</i>	16%	(110)
<i>Not sure:</i>	4%	(24)

Neither the state nor the national government garner very high levels of trust, though trust is a somewhat lower for the national government. Less than one in five voters trust either level of government just about always or most of the time. About one in twelve voters say they never trust the state government, and the level of high distrust for the national government is twice that amount, at about one in six.

Low levels of trust are troubling because trust is necessary when any government asks citizens to make sacrifices for the common good. In times of crises like the nation and state are facing in 2010—ongoing wars, budget deficits, high levels of imported energy and climate change, lingering effects of a major recession, decaying infrastructure, overcrowded schools, higher education that is becoming ever more unaffordable, strain on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—citizen sacrifice may be necessary to resolve problems.

*Which would you more prefer?*

*One party controlling the White House*

*and both houses of Congress: 29% (186)*

*Divided government where a different party*

*controls at least one house in Congress: 55% (361)*

*Have not had time to think about this issue: 16% (106)*

By nearly two to one, voters preferred divided government, reflecting the high levels of distrust that they feel for government. Higher levels of distrust were significantly related to a preference for divided government.

Preference for divided government had a partisan flavor. The only group with a majority preferring one party control were strong Democrats (at 52%), who no doubt were thinking of the control they had of the White House and both houses in Congress before the election. Independents were least likely to prefer one party control (20%), reflecting their distrust of neither party. Strong Republicans no doubt had conflicting concerns in thinking about this question. On the one hand they wanted to end Democratic control of Congress, so divided government was preferable to having the Democrats control both branches of government. On the other hand, they hoped to one day have Republican control of both branches, though that would be impossible until the 2012 election. Thus they were more in favor of one party control than independents (33%), but less in favor of one party control than Democrats.