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The Intermountain West Today: A Regional Survey

Karlyn Bowman and Ruy Teixeira

October 4, 2010

What does it mean to live in the Intermountain West today? What issues are most and least important to the region's residents? Do Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah have a collective identity or are state-level differences too great? Is there an identifiable Intermountain West personality? Today we will present the results of a unique survey that attempts to answer these questions.

First, a word of thanks. We would like to thank all those who made this project possible, and particularly Rob Lang who invited us to participate. Sadly, there is very little regional polling going on in the United States, and we are particularly grateful to the conference organizers for taking an important first step to remedy this deficiency. We deal with survey data on a daily basis. We bring very different perspectives to work, but we have found collaboration on this project and an earlier project on changing electoral demography very satisfying. We are grateful to be able to build on the work of people such as Bill Frey, Rob Lang, and many others of you at this conference.

The bulk of this paper provides an overview of the regional results with results for key questions broken out by state. We conclude by taking a look at how ongoing demographic shifts may affect the public opinion profile of the region going forward. The survey, which was conducted August 23 through September 1 by Gerstein and Agne Strategic Communications, looked at the views of adults in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. The overall sample size was 2,000, with sampling adjusted to ensure a minimum of around 250

interviews per state. The specific sample sizes per state were 512 in Arizona, 478 in Colorado, 248 in Idaho, 260 in Nevada, 251 in New Mexico and 251 in Utah.

The survey was not intended to tell us about what will happen in key races in the region this fall, but to take the pulse of the region on key issues and values and to provide a portrait of the present day Intermountain West. Some of the key findings include the following:

- Strong majorities of Intermountain West residents see themselves as more likely than other Americans to have a number of characteristics—making environmental protection a top priority, engaging in outdoor activities and recreation, feeling the impact of illegal immigration, supporting the development of renewable energy sources, expressing patriotic pride, feeling skeptical of the federal government’s power, engaging in volunteer activities and joining a church.
- The top-ranked of this list was engaging with the outdoors and the third-ranked was supporting renewable energy. Consistent with this ethos, by more than 2:1 region-wide and with strong majorities in every state, Intermountain West residents felt that their state was better off “investing in wind and solar energy solutions that will generate clean, renewable energy sources and jobs for years to come” than “investing in proven technologies like clean coal and nuclear energy sources because they are guaranteed to produce jobs now.”
- The second-ranked characteristic on the list was dealing with the effects of immigration. Across the region and in five of the six states, it was also the area where the most residents wanted to see more federal government involvement. Across the region and in every state, majorities of Intermountain West residents felt the new Arizona immigration law was either about right didn’t go far enough. But across the region and in every state, residents also felt that immigrants make a positive contribution to the country and supported a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.
- A strong majority region-wide and in every state felt that the Second Amendment rights of Americans to keep and bear arms are under attack. And nearly half of regional residents agreed with a libertarian-style statement that government should strictly limit its role in individuals’ lives, rather than promote opportunity and provide security.
- But strong majorities across the region also said they wanted more federal and state government involvement in areas like protecting the environment, promoting renewable energy sources, cracking down on crime and drugs, guaranteeing quality public education and creating jobs. The latter two areas were also the ones that overall and in most states were the top two issues residents wanted their state elected officials to address.
- Intermountain West residents do not appear to be as tax-sensitive as would be suggested by a libertarian stereotype. Region-wide and in every state, majorities or pluralities felt

their federal taxes were “about right” and said they didn’t mind paying federal taxes “because we each have a responsibility to contribute to the common good and to support those who can’t support themselves.”

- On some controversial policy issues like health care reform, financial regulatory reform, the economic stimulus and gay marriage, Intermountain West residents are in synch with national attitudes. Region-wide, residents oppose the new health care reform law, support the new financial regulations, are distinctly unenthusiastic about the economic stimulus plan and oppose gay marriage, just as the national public does. But there is some important variation here within the region. New Mexico, for example, supports the health care reform law, Utah opposes the new financial regulations, and Colorado and Nevada support gay marriage.

A Political Portrait

Our survey took a close look at the political views of the Intermountain West residents. We tested views toward prominent political figures and institutions, recent controversial policy debates (health care, financial regulation, immigration) and federal involvement in a range of policy issues.

Many of the results in this survey look very much like national level results. In the poll, for example, 41 percent approved of the job the President was doing, while 54 percent disapproved, including 43 percent who disapproved strongly. In the late August-early September ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, slightly more, 46 percent nationally, approved of the job Obama was doing, while 52 percent disapproved. The high level of strong disapproval seen in the Intermountain West is also present in the national polls. Thirty-eight percent in the national ABC/*Post* poll disapproved strongly of the President’s performance.

We also asked respondents how favorable or unfavorable they were on a scale of 0 to 100 about some public figures (0-49 is scored as unfavorable, 51-100 as favorable and 50 as neutral). In this exercise, views of Barack Obama and George W. Bush were similar in the Intermountain West as a whole, with Obama slightly higher on favorable but also slightly higher on

unfavorable. Two states, Idaho and Utah, had the strongest negative views of the President.

Sarah Palin's overall favorable rating was ten percentage points lower than the President's, but her unfavorable rating was identical. Only in Utah did even four in ten rate her favorably.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Obama							
Favorable	41%	38%	44%	29%	46%	51%	32%
Unfavorable	49	49	46	63	41	43	60
Bush							
Favorable	38	40	35	40	33	36	46
Unfavorable	46	45	49	43	50	53	36
Sarah Palin							
Favorable	31	31	27	38	30	30	40
Unfavorable	49	49	54	43	50	53	40

Gallup reported recently that Congress's approval rating nationally has averaged 20 percent this year, down from 30 percent in 2009, the first year of the 111th Congress. In the West, slightly more, 26 percent, approved of the job Congress was doing. Once again, Idaho and Utah stand out in terms of especially low levels of approval.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Congress							
Approve	26%	26%	29%	20%	30%	26%	22%
Disapprove	68	64	66	73	69	71	73

Neither Democrats nor Republicans in Congress fared well in the poll. Thirty percent regionally had a favorable view of the Democrats there (51 percent unfavorable) and 32 percent the Republicans in Congress (51 percent unfavorable). Job approval nationally of both parties in Congress is also low. In a late August Gallup poll, 33 percent approved of the job Democrats in Congress were doing, while 32 percent approved of the job Republicans were doing.

Despite the equally unfavorable views of Democrats and Republicans in Congress, Intermountain West residents are clearly leaning Republican in their party identification these days. Overall, 38 percent identify with or lean towards the Democrats, while 51 percent identify with or lean towards the Republicans. They also said, by 49-40, that they will support Republican candidates for the House of Representatives over Democratic candidates.

Fewer residents in the region were familiar with the Tea Party movement (77 percent) than with the major parties. Views of it region-wide were evenly split, at 34 percent. The late August-early September Quinnipiac University national poll found that 30 percent had a favorable opinion about the movement and 31 percent an unfavorable one. In a separate question in the Quinnipiac poll, 12 percent said they considered themselves part of the movement. The responses to these two national questions have been stable since April.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Tea Party movement							
Favorable	34%	36%	30%	40%	35%	32%	36%
Unfavorable	34	27	40	27	40	40	27
Don't know*	23	27	21	25	16	18	24

Note: *Wording was "If you have never heard of a name, or don't know enough to rate them, please just say so."

Related to the Tea Party is the issue of support for third party candidates. We included an item about support for an emerging third party in our series on distinctive aspects of Intermountain West residents. Of the characteristics tested, this was the characteristic deemed least likely to be distinctive of the Intermountain West: about as many said regional residents were less likely (38 percent) than other Americans to embrace a third party as said they were more likely (42 percent).

Turning to national issues, the poll examined three of this year’s hottest policy debates. After telling respondents that President Obama signed legislation restructuring the American health care system in March, people in this survey were asked whether or not they supported or opposed the new health care reform law. Thirty-nine percent did, while 55 percent were opposed. Opposition was particularly sharp in Idaho and Utah, where two-thirds disapproved. Only in one state, New Mexico, did support outweigh opposition.

In most national polls, opposition to the new law outweighs support (though there is more support nationally for reforming it than repealing it). To take just one recent national poll, when the Gallup Organization asked in late August whether people approved or disapproved of the health care overhaul passed by Congress, the results were nearly identical to this survey. Thirty-nine percent approved, while 56 percent disapproved.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Support new health reform law	39%	38%	42%	28%	43%	50%	26%
Oppose it	55	54	52	66	50	48	67

Negative views about the health care law can also be seen in another question that asked people to choose between two views of the legislation. Forty-five percent regionally chose the statement “the new health care reform signed by President Obama may need to be fixed, but it is an important first step in lowering costs and making affordable health care available to all Americans. But 52 percent chose the response “the new health care reform law will lead to higher taxes and massive cuts to Medicare while doing little to rein in skyrocketing costs, and must be significantly changed or repealed.”

In most national polls, there has been solid majority support for greater regulation of the financial institutions. In a Gallup poll taken in late August, 61 percent nationally approved of the legislation Congress passed to increase regulation of banks and major financial institutions,

while 37 percent disapproved. When asked in the Intermountain West survey whether they favored or opposed the new financial reform that “increases federal regulation over banks, Wall Street investors, and other financial institutions,” 52 percent said they did, while 38 percent were opposed. Support was highest in Colorado and lowest in Utah.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Favor new financial reform	52%	54%	55%	48%	53%	55%	40%
Oppose	38	35	34	43	39	38	49

In the survey, people were asked whether we needed more, less, or about the same level of involvement from the federal government in addressing a number of issues¹. Solid majorities opted for more federal government involvement on seven of nine issues. The largest majorities in support of more federal involvement were on immigration, followed by jobs and economic growth, stopping crime and drugs and promoting renewable energy.

There were two areas where less than a majority of Intermountain West residents called for more federal involvement. One was health care, where just 48 percent called for more federal involvement, perhaps because people have made up their minds about the health care law, or perhaps because they believe the situation has been addressed, or perhaps because of awareness of the legislation’s price tag. Note, however, that even on this question, the number calling for less federal involvement (31 percent) was still less than the number calling for more involvement. This contrasts with other item-- promoting the role of faith in our public life--

¹ Data on support for more, same or less federal and state government involvement was gathered using a split sample methodology. We read each respondent a list of nine major issues facing the country today and asked half of the respondents whether they felt ‘we need more involvement, about the same level of involvement, or less involvement from the federal government in addressing each issue.’ The other half were asked whether ‘we need more involvement, about the same level of involvement, or less involvement from state government in [State] in addressing each issue.’ Additionally, half of each of these groups were also reminded of the deficits facing our federal and state governments and the fact that any increased spending would require either tax increases, further spending cuts in critical programs, or higher deficits (only for those asked about the federal government). This produced a four-way split of respondents in this series.

where less than a majority wants more government involvement. Here just 19 percent in the region wanted more government involvement, far less than the 54 percent who wanted less.

We also found that, even when people were reminded that “government is currently facing record deficits, and increased spending would require larger deficits, increased taxes or spending cuts in other areas” (split B), the public opinion needle on more federal government involvement moved very little. This suggests that the Intermountain West public’s interest in more government involvement in key areas is fairly robust (although of course raising taxes to support increased government activity in any of these areas would still remain a challenging political task).

Feel we need more federal government involvement in...

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Preserving the cleanliness of our air. . .							
Split A	56%	60%	57%	28%	69%	58%	44%
Split B	55	63	50	38	64	61	41
Guaranteeing a quality public education							
Split A	59	64	57	50	65	58	55
Split B	57	60	57	50	63	61	47
Promoting renewable energy sources							
Split A	61	64	57	45	72	67	54
Split B	58	65	54	46	69	58	45
Cracking down on crime and drugs in our communities							
Split A	62	66	56	52	69	70	59
Split B	57	63	51	50	65	63	47
Making affordable health care available to everyone							
Split A	48	54	48	32	48	54	36
Split B	49	56	54	31	52	52	28
Stopping the flow of illegal immigrants across our borders							
Split A	74	77	74	64	76	67	74
Split B	74	71	72	75	78	72	78
Dealing with the millions of illegal immigrants living here							
Split A	69	75	58	64	80	58	79
Split B	71	71	69	73	71	71	74
Creating jobs and economic growth							
Split A	68	70	69	43	79	77	52
Split B	64	72	63	51	63	57	57
Promoting the role of faith in our public life							
Split A	19	19	15	14	23	34	19
Split B	25	27	24	25	25	38	13

Note: Categories “about the same level of involvement” and “less involvement” not shown here.

The state variation in the table shows some interesting patterns². Idaho residents are clearly the least supportive of more government involvement. For example, only 28 percent wanted to see more involvement in preserving clean air and in two areas, promoting renewable

² However, the state figures should be treated with some caution because of small sample sizes generated by the split sampling exercise. We include them because they are interesting and seem generally plausible when compared to the state level variation seen on full sample questions.

energy and creating jobs and economic growth, Idaho was the only state where less than half the public wanted to see more involvement. In contrast, Nevada residents were most likely to call for more federal government involvement. Areas where Nevada residents topped all other states in support for more involvement included dealing with illegal immigrants living here (80 percent), creating jobs and economic growth (79 percent), promoting renewable energy (72 percent), preserving clean air (69 percent) and guaranteeing a quality public education (65 percent).

Immigration

Immigration has been on the front burner for months, especially for residents of the Intermountain West. In the survey, we asked respondents about certain characteristics that made the region distinctive. Seventy-five percent said residents of the Intermountain West were more likely to feel the impact of illegal immigration than people in other regions. Only 15 percent said they were less likely to feel the impact.

This was the second most important quality separating regional residents, in their view, from the rest of the country (number one was engaging in outdoor activities and recreation, discussed in the environment section of the paper). It should be stressed that this opinion extends beyond partisan or demographic lines and is relatively consistent regardless of respondents' position on how to address the immigration issue (discussed below); no matter how they feel about the response to illegal immigration, they agree that residents of this region have a unique understanding of the issue because of their role on its front lines. As we see throughout this survey, the simplistic storylines that often surround the immigration issue do not match the reality of this region. Attitudes on the issue are very complex and do not reflect the rigid orthodoxy of the debate in Washington.

Another question in our survey told respondents that the state of Arizona “recently passed a law that gives the police the power to question anyone they suspect is in the country illegally, requires people to produce documents verifying their status if asked, and allows officers to detain anyone who cannot do so.” When asked whether this law goes too far in dealing with the issue of illegal immigration, doesn’t go far enough, or is about right, 36 percent regionally said it went too far, 45 percent said it was about right, and 17 percent not far enough. In May and July, CBS News asked a question nationally that was similar to this one, telling people that “as you may know, the state of Arizona recently passed a law that gives the police the power to question someone they have already stopped, detained, or arrested about their legal status in the country. The law requires people to produce documents verifying their status if asked.” Twenty-eight percent in May said the law went too far in dealing with the issue of illegal immigration, 52 percent said it was about right, and 17 percent not far enough. In July those national-level responses were 23, 57, and 17 percent, respectively.

	Arizona’s immigration law		
	Goes too far	About right	Not far enough
Total	36%	45%	17%
AZ	35	44	18
CO	42	40	16
ID	28	49	20
NV	35	45	18
NM	36	47	14
UT	30	50	15

In the question series on more, less or the same level of federal involvement in various issues (described above), the two largest majorities in favor of more government involvement were on stopping the flow of illegal immigrants across the border (74 percent) and on dealing with the millions of illegal immigrants already here (69 percent). This suggests the depth of concern about the immigration issue in these states.

National polls show that most Americans believe dealing with immigration is a national issue. But they also tell pollsters that Arizona was right to act in the absence of federal government action. When asked in a separate question in this survey whether their *state* government should be more involved in stopping the flow of illegal immigrants across the border, 63 percent of respondents said yes. As for dealing with those already here, a similar number (62 percent) said they wanted their state government more involved.

Two pairs of statements in the survey probed attitudes about immigrants and about immigration reform. Regionally, 52 percent chose the statement “As they have for generations, immigrants today continue to enrich our culture and strength our economy,” while 40 percent viewed immigrants today “as a burden on our country because they take our jobs and use government benefits. There were only small differences on this question by state. Arizonans, for example, split 54 to 39 percent on this question.

Most Americans are not punitive in their views about immigration and that is true in the Intermountain West despite residents’ high levels of concern about the issue. In this poll, 58 percent chose the statement that “illegal immigrants who have been living and working in the United States for years, and who do not have a criminal record, should be allowed to start on a path to citizenship by registering that they are in the country, paying a fine, getting fingerprinted, and learning English.” Thirty-eight percent endorse the other statement that there should be “no amnesty, social services, or other benefits given to illegal immigrants who have broken the laws of our country by coming here illegally in the first place.” Views were remarkably similar across the states in the region.

The State of the States

People are usually more optimistic about conditions in their states than they are about national level conditions, and the responses in this survey follow that pattern. The right track/wrong direction question was first asked in the early 1970s by the Roper Organization. In most years, in national surveys when the question has been asked, the country has been heading in the wrong direction. The level of national pessimism reflected in this question today is toward the high end of usually negative responses, and it is mirrored in the states we surveyed. Only a quarter thought things in the country were going on the right track, while two-thirds said they were going in the wrong direction. Those results are very similar to current national responses.

Residents of the Intermountain West were more optimistic about their states than the nation as a whole, but they could hardly be described as enthusiastic. Just 37 percent said things in their state were going in the right direction, while 54 percent said they had gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track. In terms of state level differences, this question produced some stark differences, with the level of pessimism in Nevada (76 percent) far surpassing any of the other states in the region. In contrast, Utah residents actually were more optimistic (56 percent) than pessimistic (36 percent).

Things in this state are going in the

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Right direction	37%	34%	41%	41%	17%	30%	56%
Off on wrong track	54	58	48	45	76	59	36

Views of adults in Nevada about the performance of their governor were much more negative than were views of adults in other states as the table below shows. Colorado and New

Mexico residents also gave majority disapproval to their governors. On the other hand, Utah, Idaho and Arizona gave their governors solid majority approval. The latter finding is striking since Arizona residents also were so pessimistic about the direction of their state.

Your governor

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Approve	48%	56%	44%	58%	32%	43%	55%
Disapprove	39	34	42	32	59	52	21

The verdict on the economic stimulus passed in 2009 was decidedly negative in the Intermountain West. Just thirty-seven percent of residents believed the stimulus plan “helped avert an even greater economic crisis and is making investments that will ultimately help create jobs and economic growth,” while 59 percent said it “produced few jobs and wasted billions of taxpayer dollars, increased the deficit, hurt American business, and weakened our economy.”

In our survey, respondents were asked to rate policy priorities for their state on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 was extremely important and zero was not at all important. Given widespread economic pessimism, it is hardly surprising that creating new jobs and economic growth was the top issue people in the region (and in five of the six states) wanted their elected officials to address. Overall, this issue received a mean rating of 8.7 with 69 percent giving it a very high rating of 9 or 10.

Second overall and in four of the six states was improving state schools (mean of 8.5, 62 percent 9-10 ratings) and third was fighting crime (mean of 8.5, 58 percent 9-10 ratings). Also rated highly were reducing federal government spending (8, 56 percent), reducing illegal immigration (7.7, 53 percent), moral decline (7.7, 52 percent) and protecting the environment (8, 51 percent). Reducing taxes, limiting federal government power, and promoting alternative energy sources were less highly rated and by far the least highly rated was

congestion/overdevelopment. The latter finding is perhaps surprising given the high profile of this issue in some campaigns and communities.

Points 9-10 (with “10” indicating “extremely important” for state elected officials make this a top priority)

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Creating new jobs and growth	69%	75%	68%	52%	69%	70%	62%
Schools	62	70	55	59	64	70	54
Fighting crime	58	72	46	49	57	63	54
Fed govt spending	56	56	53	56	60	51	62
Illegal immigrants	53	64	42	45	57	53	51
Moral decline	52	56	45	50	52	53	60
Environment	51	54	49	38	55	58	40
Health care	47	51	46	32	52	56	38
Reducing taxes	43	44	41	38	45	47	42
Limit power federal govt.	42	41	39	46	42	45	50
Alternative energy	40	47	35	30	48	46	27
Congestion/overdevelopment	26	27	25	18	32	30	22

Note: Full wording for each category: creating new jobs and economic growth; improving state schools; fighting crime and drugs in our communities; reducing federal government spending; reducing the flow of illegal immigrants into the U.S.; standing up to our country’s moral decline; protecting our environment and natural resources; ensuring access to affordable health care; reducing taxes; limiting the power of the federal government; promoting alternative energy sources like wind and solar; reducing congestion and opposing overdevelopment.

In the survey, people were asked whether they felt the need for more, less, or about the same level of involvement from their state government in addressing a number of issues³. These questions exactly paralleled the series of questions we asked about more, less or the same amount of federal government involvement. Solid majorities opted for more state government involvement on seven of nine issues, the same pattern we observed in the federal government series. But there were some important differences. One was that support for more state

³ Again, state figures in the table for this series should be treated with some caution because of small sample sizes generated by the split sampling exercise. We include them because they are interesting and seem generally plausible when compared to the state level variation seen on full sample questions.

government involvement was somewhat stronger in most areas than support for more federal government involvement (already fairly high). Another was that the largest majorities in support of more state involvement were on jobs/economic growth (67 percent) and on guaranteeing a quality public education (66 percent), rather than immigration issues. In addition, promoting renewable energy sources (65 percent) and cracking down on crime and drugs (65 percent) also ranked higher on more involvement than immigration issues.

As with the federal government series, there were two areas where less than a majority of Intermountain West residents called for more involvement by their state government. One was health care, where 49 percent called for more state involvement. But the number calling for less state government involvement (29 percent) was still less than the number calling for more involvement. Far below health care was promoting the role of faith in our public life; here just 23 percent in the region wanted more state government involvement, compared to 50 percent who wanted less.

We also found that, even when people were reminded that “[State] has been forced to make significant cuts in the state's budget due to current economic conditions government is currently facing record deficits, and increased spending would require increased taxes or spending cuts in other areas” (split D), the public opinion needle on more state government involvement moved only modestly. This suggests that the Intermountain West public’s interest in more state government involvement in key areas is strong and not easily shaken (again, raising taxes to support increased government activity in any of these areas would still remain a challenging political task for governors and legislators).

Feel the need for more state government involvement in...

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Preserving the cleanliness of our air. . .							
Split C	58%	66%	54%	47%	57%	58%	58%
Split D	53	54	49	34	72	64	38
Guaranteeing a quality public education							
Split C	66	71	59	69	59	88	60
Split D	67	68	62	64	81	76	59
Promoting renewable energy sources							
Split C	65	71	57	58	67	72	61
Split D	58	64	51	56	69	75	39
Cracking down on crime and drugs in our communities							
Split C	65	81	51	52	62	67	66
Split D	61	64	48	70	75	69	55
Making affordable health care available to everyone							
Split C	49	54	49	37	43	58	39
Split D	50	55	41	41	67	54	45
Stopping the flow of illegal immigrants across our borders							
Split C	63	64	54	67	76	69	62
Split D	68	69	69	73	64	73	65
Dealing with the millions of illegal immigrants living here							
Split C	62	64	58	58	62	62	70
Split D	66	65	65	67	64	68	69
Creating jobs and economic growth							
Split C	67	72	63	58	60	78	62
Split D	70	77	65	64	76	79	54
Promoting the role of faith in our public life							
Split C	23	25	17	20	23	17	36
Split D	25	29	16	17	31	28	29

Note: Categories “about the same level of involvement” and “less involvement” not shown here.

It is clear from this survey that residents of the Intermountain West want Washington and their states to do many things, none of which can be accomplished easily or inexpensively. That many explain the only middling level of concern about taxes (see previous question), despite the

region’s reputation for anti-tax sentiment. Several other results from this survey bear on the issues of taxes.

Since 1947 the Gallup Organization has asked people whether the federal taxes they pay are too high, too low, or about right. Hardly anyone ever says they are too low. For most of the long history of this question, people had said that their federal income taxes are too high. But on several occasions in the past decade, people nationally have said that they are about right. In this survey, 41 percent of residents of the Intermountain West said the federal income taxes they paid this year were too high, but 53 percent said they were about right. Just 2 percent said they were too low. These sentiments varied surprisingly little across the region with residents in every state more likely to say their federal taxes were about right than to say they were too high.

When asked about the property taxes they paid, 43 percent said they were too high, and 46 percent about right. But, departing from the overall pattern, residents of two states—Arizona and Utah—were more likely to say their property taxes were too high than about right.

Federal income taxes

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Too high	41%	40%	42%	38%	41%	41%	45%
About right	53	54	52	54	55	54	47

Property taxes

Too high	43%	46%	40%	40%	43%	41%	46%
About right	46	43	49	52	45	53	39

Also in the survey, 53 percent said that they didn’t mind paying federal taxes “because we each have a responsibility to contribute to the common good and to support those who can’t support themselves,” while 40 percent said they didn’t like paying federal taxes “because the government in Washington is wasteful, inefficient, and doesn’t do anything for people like me.” Only in Utah were the results close, with 49 percent saying they didn’t mind paying federal

taxes, and 46 percent said they didn't like paying them. Again, this somewhat belies the common image of the region as embracing a libertarian stance on taxes.

In another question in the survey, 51 percent agreed with the statement that "the gap between rich and poor should be reduced, even if it means higher taxes for the wealthy," while almost as many, 46 percent disagreed. Agreement with the statement was between 53 and 56 percent in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico but only 45 percent in Idaho and 39 percent in Utah.

The Environmental Ethos of the Intermountain West

One of the defining characteristics of the mountain states region in our survey was the belief that people in the region were more likely to engage in outdoor activities and recreation than people in other areas. Eighty-five percent gave that response--the highest of any characteristic tested--with more than 90 percent answering that way in Idaho, Utah, and Colorado.

In addition, 61 percent said that residents of the region were more likely than residents of other regions to make environmental protection top priority. Once again there were some notable differences by state, with nearly eight in ten in Colorado giving that response, compared to half in Idaho and Nevada. A third question about supporting the development of renewable energy source such as wind and solar confirms Coloradans' more intense interest in these issues--83 percent in Colorado saw this as a defining regional characteristic, compared to 75 percent overall.

More likely to.....

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Engage in outdoor activities and recreation	85%	78%	91%	93%	76%	86%	93%
Make environmental protection a high priority	61	55	79	50	50	59	53
Support development of renewable energy sources	75	77	83	66	76	75	58

Note, however, that the environment wasn't as high a priority for state officials to address as the more traditional issues of jobs, crime, and schools (see table above). Fifty-one percent put the issue at points 9 and 10 on a 10 point scale in terms of top priorities for the state. Seven in ten gave that response about job creation, for example.

On the question of federal government activity, environmental issues didn't have the same intensity as immigration issues and jobs, but still, majorities said they wanted the government to do more to preserve the cleanliness of our air, water, and other natural resources (56 percent) and, in a separate question, to promote renewable energy sources (61 percent). When asked about state level activity in these areas, majorities in favor of more involvement are somewhat larger (58 percent and 65 percent, respectively). But, interestingly, Coloradans, despite their view that environmental and renewable energy issues are central to the Mountain West ethos, are not particularly high on calling for more federal or state involvement in these areas (see tables).

Another question that asked people whether they agreed more with one statement or other other found that by a decisive 64 to 30 percent, residents of the region felt that their state was better off "investing in wind and solar energy solutions that will generate clean, renewable energy sources and jobs for years to come" than "investing in proven technologies like clean coal

and nuclear energy sources because they are guaranteed to produce jobs now.” Majorities in favor of the first statement were strong in each state, with the highest in New Mexico (71 percent) and the lowest in Utah (56 percent).

As for climate change, 51 percent said the statement “climate change is a real threat with potentially disastrous consequences, and we must take steps now to reduce the damage created by fossil fuels and other pollutants” while 44 percent said the statement that “climate change is just a theory based on unproven science that is designed to support radical energy policies that will increase costs for American families and business” came closer to their views. Majorities of residents in Idaho and Utah chose the “just a theory” response.

Climate change

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
A real threat . . .	51%	56%	51%	42%	51%	54%	39%
Just a theory . . .	44	39	45	53	44	40	53

Political Ideology and Views of Government

The survey asked which of four labels best described the respondents’ “political perspective”--progressive, liberal, libertarian, or conservative. The results, after those who initially said “moderate” were asked which of these labels they’d choose if they had to pick one, are shown below (the 2 percent of respondents who stuck with the moderate label after the follow-up question are omitted from the table). As the table shows, while conservative was easily the most popular label (48 percent), there were some substantial differences by state, with 57 percent in Idaho and 60 percent in Utah describing themselves as conservative, compared to just 41 percent in New Mexico. Combining the progressive and liberal categories yields 38 percent on the left, with the highest proportion in New Mexico (44 percent) and the lowest in

Utah (26 percent). These figures differ from the most recent national figures (a Center for American Progress/Hart Research survey in May of this year) where there were nearly as many progressives/liberals (40 percent) as conservatives (42 percent). The number of libertarians was the same however.

Describe self as

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Progressive	16%	15%	18	8%	16%	21%	11%
Liberal	22	22	24	20	23	25	14
Libertarian	7	5	6	9	10	5	9
Conservative	48	50	44	57	44	41	60

The ranks of self-identified libertarians in each state were small. But another question in the survey that asked people which of two statements came closer to their view produced an even split regionally between a more liberal/progressive idea that “government should promote economic opportunity and provide for minimum measures of security such as food, housing, medical care and old age protection” (47 percent) and a more libertarian conception that “government should strictly limit its role in individuals’ lives so they are left alone to pursue their lives as they please and to deal with the consequences of their actions on their own,” (48 percent). The latter idea generated exceptionally high support (60 percent) in Utah.

Comes closer to your own view

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Government should promote economic opportunity and provide minimum measures of security . . .	47%	52%	46%	46%	48%	52%	34%
Government should strictly limit its role in individuals’ lives . . .	48	44	48	51	48	43	60

Another question in the survey asked whether residents of the region were more likely than Americans elsewhere to feel “skeptical of the federal government’s power and reach.” A strong majority (64 percent) of those surveyed believed this libertarian-leaning sentiment was an identifying characteristic of Intermountain West residents.

On the other hand, another question about whether government regulations “are necessary to keep businesses in check and protect workers and consumers” or whether such regulations “prevent economic growth by stifling innovation and investment”, elicited a solid 55-39 majority in favor of the first statement. There was also a weaker majority in favor of the idea that state government regulation is needed to prevent overdevelopment and strategically plan growth (51 percent) over the idea that state government regulation unfairly restricts property rights and limits economic growth (43 percent).

Government programs for the poor elicit a less sanguine view of government’s role. By 60-34, Intermountain West residents believe such programs “undermine individual initiative and responsibility.”

Cultural and Social Issues

The survey also tested the Intermountain West public’s view of some cultural and social issues. Again showing some libertarian-style sentiments, 64 percent in the survey agreed with the statement “the Second Amendment rights of all Americans to keep and bear arms are under direct threat in our country today.” Majorities in Idaho, New Mexico, and Utah strongly agreed with the statement. Thirty-four percent of the region’s residents owned one or more guns or rifles.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Agree, Second Amendment rights of all Americans to keep and bear arms are under direct threat in our country today	64%	61%	57%	76%	68%	77%	70%
Agree strongly	44	37	38	56	47	56	54

Sixty percent of adults in the region thought their fellow residents of the **Intermountain** West were more likely to join a church or other organized religion community than Americans in other region. However, Intermountain West residents also said they were averse to mixing politics and religion, with 58 percent agreeing the country had gone too far in that direction. Strong majorities in every state but Utah agreed with this proposition.

In addition, a direct question about religious practice yielded just 35 percent who said they attend religious service every week or almost every week (the rate is by far the highest in Utah). At the other end of the spectrum, 32 percent said they never attended at all.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Attend church more than once a week/every week	35%	35%	29%	40%	27%	30%	58%
Never	32	34	34	25	38	28	20

Note: Not all categories shown.

Forty-nine percent of Protestants described themselves as “born again,” including 65 percent in New Mexico, 56 percent in Nevada, 52 percent in Idaho, and 51 percent in Utah.

On the issue of gay marriage, 43 percent said same sex marriages should be recognized by law with the same rights as traditional marriages, with 49 percent dissenting. Two states in the region, Colorado and Nevada, had majorities or pluralities in favor of gay marriage, while Idaho and Utah had large majorities against. Fifty-seven percent of the youngest age cohort (18-

29 year olds) in the poll said gay marriage should be recognized by law, as did a plurality of those ages 30-39 years. All other age groups opposed legal recognition. This is a familiar pattern in national polls, where the youngest age cohort is most receptive to legally recognized gay marriage. In most national surveys, the public as a whole continues to draw the line at gay marriage, though that is shifting over time.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Same-sex marriages should be recognized by law with the same rights as traditional marriages	43%	49%	52%	32%	48%	45%	30%
Should not	49	50	43	62	41	51	64

Another question in the poll also probes the social conservatism of the **Intermountain** West. People were asked whether they agreed with the statement “If financially able to do so, it is better for a woman to stay at home and take care of the household than to hold a job outside the home.” A quarter of those in all states strongly agreed with the statement, but 30 percent strongly disagreed. Overall 44 percent agreed with statement while 47 percent did not, with majority agreement only in the very conservative states of Idaho and Utah.

	T	AZ	CO	ID	NV	NM	UT
Agree, it is better for a woman to stay at home and take care of the household . . .	44%	43%	40%	53%	39%	38%	61%
Strongly agree	25	24	20	23	24	22	42

Finally, the poll found an impressive 61-37 majority agreed with the idea that “cultural institutions, the arts and public broadcasting play an important role in society and should receive government support”. There were strong majorities across every state in favor of this

proposition, somewhat surprising in light of the conservative cultural stance of some of these states.

Demographic Change and Public Opinion in the Intermountain West Region

By and large, Intermountain West residents display the demographic variation in attitudes common in American politics today. For example, single people have a more liberal take on issues like health care, financial regulation and support for government action than their married counterparts. Rather than rehearse these demographic differences, we feel it's more interesting to consider survey demographics as they connect most directly to processes of demographic change that are transforming the Intermountain West region.

In this context, one critical demographic is youth, the rising Millennial generation that will exert increasing influence on the political and attitudinal complexion of the Intermountain West going forward. In our survey, 18-29 year olds were definitely distinctive in their views relative to older residents of the region. They were markedly more sympathetic to the new health care reform law, more sympathetic to immigrants and immigration reform, more supportive of increased government involvement, especially in areas like renewable energy, environmental protection and education, more supportive of free trade and far more supportive of gay marriage. Another paper for this conference by Scott Keeter discusses Millennials and their attitudinal profile in more detail.

Another way to look at demographic change and attitudes is to focus on three groups that are heavily implicated in demographic trends in the Intermountain West (see William Frey and Ruy Teixeira's paper for this conference): the white working class (defined here as those without

a four-year college degree), white college graduates and minorities. Together they tell a very interesting story about how public opinion may evolve in the region in the future.

The white working class is the most conservative of these three groups, significantly more conservative than white college graduates in a number of important ways. These include support for health care reform (27 percent white working class vs. 39 percent white college graduates), financial regulatory reform (43 percent vs. 55 percent) and gay marriage (39 percent vs. 46 percent).

In terms of immigration, the contrast is particularly strong. Only 42 percent of white working class residents agreed that “As they have for generations, immigrants today continue to enrich our culture and strengthen our economy,” compared to 62 percent of white college graduates. And 50 percent of the white working class thought “illegal immigrants who have been living and working in the United States for years, and who do not have a criminal record, should be allowed to start on a path to citizenship by registering that they are in the country, paying a fine, getting fingerprinted, and learning English” compared to 65 percent of white college graduates.

The white working class also appears to be more tax-sensitive. Half of this group views their federal taxes as “about right” compared to 60 percent of white college graduates. And 46 percent of the white working class said that they didn’t mind paying federal taxes “because we each have a responsibility to contribute to the common good and to support those who can’t support themselves,” compared to 59 percent of white college graduates.

The contrast is also strong on free trade. Just 44 percent of white working class residents thought free trade was good for America “because it creates new markets for our goods and services and lowers costs for consumers,” compared to 60 percent of white college graduates.

In terms of interest in more government involvement in addressing issues, white working class and college graduate residents differ little on issues around education, energy and environment. However, on crime/drugs and on jobs/economic growth, white working class interest in more government involvement is substantially higher than among white college graduates.

Both of these groups, however, differ from minority residents, who are primarily Hispanic, in their appetite for increased government action. Minorities are 14 points higher than either of these two groups on increased federal government involvement in protecting the environment, 18 points higher on education, 24 points higher on health care and so on. And 57 percent of minorities endorsed the idea that government should promote economic opportunity and provide security over the concept that government should strictly limit its role in individuals' lives. Minorities are also more strongly in favor of financial regulatory reform (61 percent) and health care reform (53 percent).

On several other issues, minorities are more liberal than working class whites, but no more liberal than college-educated whites. Their level of support for gay marriage, for example, is about the same as white college grads. And, intriguingly, minority support for the idea that immigrants enrich our culture and strengthen our economy and for a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants was about on the level of white college grads, but no higher. They also expressed about the same level of agreement with the idea that they didn't mind paying federal taxes because they are used to provide for the common good. However, minorities' view that federal and property taxes were about right was less than white college grads and on a par with the white working class.

Minorities are also less supportive of free trade than white college graduates. However, their support is still higher than among the white working class.

The Frey-Teixeira paper shows that across the region the general pattern in states is a decline in the white working class share of eligible voters balanced by a rise in the white college graduate and, especially, minority share of eligible voters. These changes are substantial: the white working class share is declining at a rate of about half a percentage point a year in each state, except in Nevada where it is a full percentage point a year. This means that, over time, we can expect the views of white working class residents to become less influential in the Intermountain West and the views of white college graduate and minority residents to become more influential. This could mean the following:

- More support for government involvement in most areas, especially education, energy, the environment and health care, and for government regulation
- Less tax sensitivity
- A warmer attitude toward immigrants and a path to citizenship for illegals
- More support for free trade
- Less support for socially conservative positions like opposing gay marriage (this like most other changes here will be reinforced by the effects of generational change)

We hasten to add that these changes will occur only gradually and that the views of the Intermountain West public will remain complicated and nuanced, just as described in the body of this report. However, this analysis suggests that those views should not be considered as static; there are some predictable effects of demographic change that both parties will have to contend with going forward.

Another side of these possible public opinion changes is that they are likely to be disproportionately concentrated in the largest, typically fast-growing metros in the region—

Phoenix in Arizona, Denver in Colorado, Boise in Idaho, Las Vegas in Nevada, Albuquerque in New Mexico and Salt Lake City in Utah—areas where the white working class tends to be declining rapidly with minorities and white college graduates taking their place. These areas, compared to the rest of their states, already lean in the direction described in the bullet points above, a lean that will be enhanced by these ongoing demographic shifts⁴.

Conclusion

According to our survey, healthy majorities of Intermountain West residents see themselves as more likely than other Americans to have a number of characteristics—making environmental protection a top priority, engaging in outdoor activities and recreation, feeling the impact of illegal immigration, supporting the development of renewable energy sources, expressing patriotic pride, feeling skeptical of the federal government’s power, engaging in volunteer activities and joining a church.

The top-ranked of this list was engaging with the outdoors and the third-ranked was supporting renewable energy. Consistent with this ethos, by more than 2:1 region-wide and with strong majorities in every state, Intermountain West residents felt that their state was better off “investing in wind and solar energy solutions that will generate clean, renewable energy sources and jobs for years to come” than “investing in proven technologies like clean coal and nuclear energy sources because they are guaranteed to produce jobs now.”

The second-ranked characteristic on the list was dealing with the effects of immigration and here too the survey found evidence that the issue did tie the region together. Across the region and in five of the six states, it was the area where the most residents wanted to see more federal government involvement. Across the region and in every state, majorities of

⁴ Demographic shifts in these metros are discussed in considerable detail in the Frey and Teixeira paper.

Intermountain West residents felt the new Arizona immigration law was either about right didn't go far enough. But across the region and in every state, regional residents also felt that immigrants make a positive contribution to the country and supported a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

The survey also found some evidence of a libertarian bent, consistent with Intermountain West's residents' view of themselves as being skeptical of federal government power. For example, a strong majority region-wide and in every state felt that the Second Amendment rights of Americans to keep and bear arms are under attack. And nearly half of regional residents agreed with a libertarian-style statement that government should strictly limit its role in individuals' lives, rather than promote opportunity and provide security.

But other findings from the survey confound the libertarian stereotype, as strong majorities across the region said they wanted more federal and state government involvement in areas like protecting the environment, promoting renewable energy sources, cracking down on crime and drugs, guaranteeing quality public education and creating jobs. The latter two areas were also the ones that overall and in most states were the top two issues residents wanted their state elected officials to address. Regional residents also supported the idea that government regulation of business is necessary.

Nor do Intermountain West residents appear to be as tax-sensitive as would be suggested by a libertarian stereotype. Region-wide and in every state, majorities or pluralities felt their federal taxes were "about right" and said they didn't mind paying federal taxes "because we each have a responsibility to contribute to the common good and to support those who can't support themselves."

Finally, on some controversial policy issues like health care reform, financial regulatory reform, the economic stimulus and gay marriage, Intermountain West residents are in synch with national attitudes. Region-wide, residents oppose the new health care reform law, support the new financial regulations, are distinctly unenthusiastic about the economic stimulus plan and oppose gay marriage, just as the national public does. But there is some important variation here within the region. New Mexico, for example, supports the health care reform law, Utah opposes the new financial regulations and Colorado and Nevada support gay marriage.

More generally, as one would expect from voting patterns and general knowledge, our survey finds that New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado residents are more liberal than those in Arizona, who, in turn, are more liberal than those in Utah and Idaho. This diversity creates a tension that co-exists uneasily with the unifying characteristics and views described above. It will be interesting to see whether the demographic changes described in the last part of this paper create more unity in the Intermountain West region or wind up accentuating the differences. Whatever the outcome, it seems safe to say that the parties will face very challenging political terrain where nothing should be taken for granted and where conventional stereotypes about the Intermountain West should be treated very, very cautiously.