

Evangelicals see 8-point drop in support for immigration reform

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Majorities of every religious group except for white evangelical Protestants support a path toward citizenship for undocumented immigrants, according to a poll released Tuesday (June 10).

The poll from the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution shows that support for immigration reform among white evangelicals has seen an 8-point drop over the past year, to 48 percent.

Among white mainline Protestants, 58 percent are supportive, a proportion topped by minority Protestants at 62 percent, Catholics at 63 percent, and religiously unaffiliated Americans at 68 percent.

The drop in white evangelical support comes as Americans' overall views about immigrants have grown more positive, the poll shows. It also counters the "fairly steady public drumbeat from evangelical leaders" who have lobbied for a path to citizenship, said Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI.

But evangelicals are not only religious people, but also overwhelmingly Republican, Jones noted, and got a different set of signals from Republicans in Congress who shelved immigration reform six months ago.

"The legislative steam has run out on this issue," he said.

The poll also found that concerns about the nation's moral fiber rank low compared with other priorities for all but three (often overlapping) groups: conservatives, Republicans, and regular churchgoers.

Every ideological, racial, and political group ranked job creation highest. The deficit and health care took second. But only Republicans, conservatives and churchgoers

considered “dealing with the moral breakdown of the country” the third-most important issue for Congress and President Obama to address.

The poll of 1,538 adults, supported by the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was conducted between April 7 and 27 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points.