



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Voters to Legislators: “Hands-Off Our Courts”

Fourth Annual DRI National Poll Shows Broad and Overwhelming Public Opposition to Legislative and Executive Interference in the Work of the Courts

CHICAGO (October 15, 2015) — A poll released today shows that a large majority of Americans, across more than ten demographic categories, oppose legislative or executive interference intended to influence the decisions of the courts. Among registered voters, 68 percent oppose any attempt to reduce court funding by state legislatures because of unhappiness with a court decision. And that opposition is bipartisan: 71 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of Republicans, and 69 percent of Independents oppose such actions.

These results are from the fourth annual DRI National Poll on the Civil Justice System, the only annual public opinion survey of its kind. The study is based on national, random-sample telephone interviews of 1,006 adults produced for DRI by the independent survey research firm [Langer Research Associates, New York](#). The poll is overseen by DRI’s Center for Law and Public Policy.

Voters oppose other forms of retaliation as well. A large majority of registered voters (60 percent) would oppose action by legislators to limit the court’s ability to rule on certain issues or to remove judges (55 percent) over disagreement with court decisions.

Opinions are perhaps influenced by a long-running, high-visibility, high-stakes battle in the state of Kansas. There, the state legislature, supported by the governor, threatened to remove all funding from the state courts unless the courts ruled in favor of a specific, controversial piece of legislation.

“It is particularly heartening to see the public side with the courts,” said DRI president Laura Proctor. “We have seen, all too frequently, the result in foreign countries when the independence of the courts is compromised by illegitimate interference by the political class. In those systems, if justice is obtained at all, it is obtained accidentally.”

“This demonstrates the value of the DRI poll,” said DRI Executive Director John R. Kouris. “In Kansas and elsewhere, the public has largely been made bystanders while the courts have had to battle both the

legislature and the governor to resist political pressure. The poll gives voice to those to whom the courts truly belong, the public. And they have responded unequivocally.”

In a related question, respondents were asked whether public opinion, the legislature, or the governor have too much, too little, or about the right amount of influence on the courts. Here, an interesting division occurs among the respondents. Only 15 percent feel that the legislature or the governor has too little influence on the courts. A much larger percentage (40%) feels that public opinion has too little influence on the courts, certainly still a minority, albeit a much larger one. Hispanics, by the largest percentage by far among the demographic groups surveyed, feel that public opinion has too little influence on the courts, a whopping 56%.

“Let’s face it,” said Jack (Skip) McCowan, chair of the Center for Law and Public Policy, “the public is just not as aware of the courts as they are of the other two branches of government. And yet, the courts are a citizen’s last line of defense against government overreach. The poll fills an information void for policymakers and introduces a Democratic element into the national debate that would otherwise be dominated by narrow vested or political interests. This, in turn, brings accountability.”

For purposes of transparency and accessibility, a full data set of the survey and methodology will be available to journalists and researchers through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.

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