

# Arab American Attitudes & the September 11 Attacks

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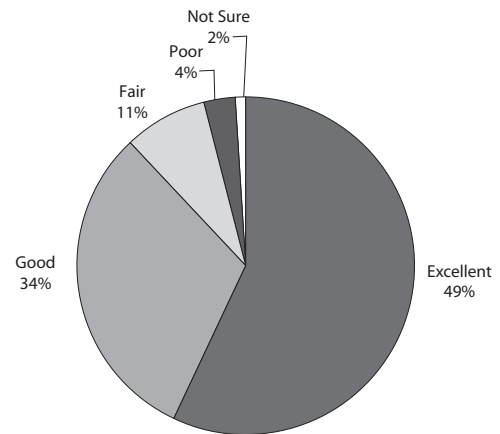
Arab Americans are proud and committed Americans, who give strong support to President Bush's efforts to combat the terrorists who struck the United States. At the same time, Arab Americans are very concerned about the backlash that occurred after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The community, however, has remained committed to its beliefs and heritage.

These are some of the results of a Zogby International (ZI) poll of Arab American attitudes commissioned by the Arab American Institute (AAI). The ZI/AAI poll surveyed 508 randomly selected Arab Americans from October 8-10 and had a margin of error of +4.5%. The poll results can be grouped under three main headings.

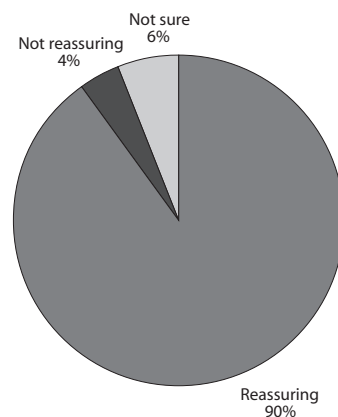
## I. Arab American Attitudes Toward President Bush and the War on Terror

Arab Americans give strong support to President George W. Bush's performance in office. Eighty-three percent of Arab Americans give the President a positive rating, as opposed to only 15% who give him a negative rating (See Figure 1). Additionally, eighty-eight percent of Arab Americans approve of Bush's handling of the response to the September 11 attacks.

While much of this positive attitude reflects the general mood of all Americans, some of it may also be the result of the President's many outreach efforts to the Arab American community since September 11. In fact, the ZI/AAI poll shows that 90% of Arab Americans strongly approve of "Bush's conduct and comments" toward the community during the past month (See Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Rate President Bush's handling of the response to the terrorist attack.**



**Figure 2: Has President Bush's conduct and comments toward Arab Americans since the September 11 terrorist attacks been reassuring or not reassuring?**

When asked if they would "support or oppose an all-out war against countries which harbor or aid terrorists who have attacked the United States", sixty-nine percent of Arab Americans indicated they would support such a move (Exhibit 3). Only 23% are opposed. And 63% of Arab Americans indicate that they are afraid that the September 11 attacks will damage the economy (See Figure 4).

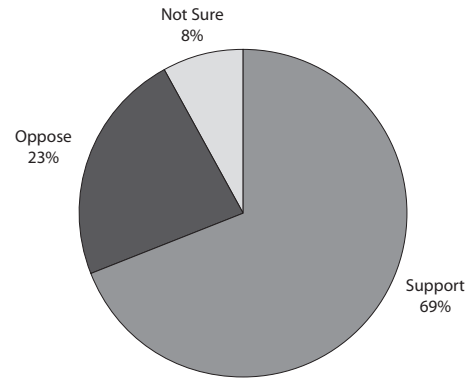
It is imperative to note that in most of the above cases, there is uniform concern among most of the subgroups within the broader community. For example, the support for the war effort is shared by Arab Americans who are native-born, immigrants to the US, young and old, Christian and Muslim, and male and female.

## II. Fear of Discrimination

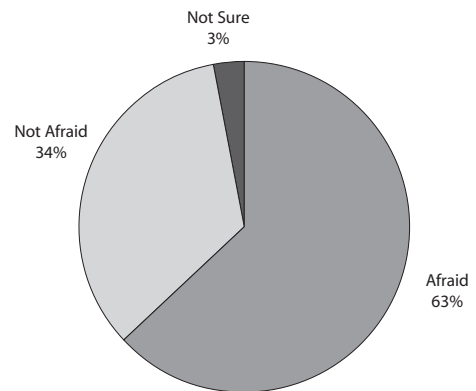
One of the by-products of the September 11 attacks has been a backlash against Arab Americans. The ZI/AAI poll highlights this reality and the concern that it has generated within the community.

### A. Discrimination

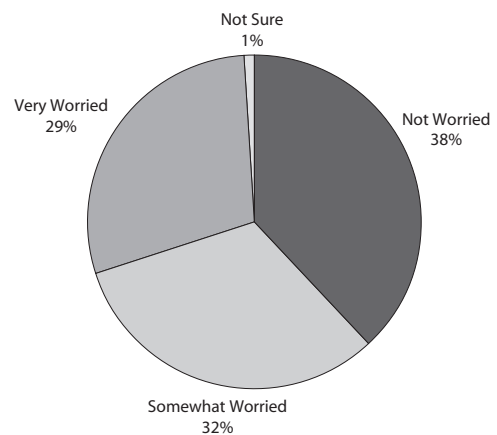
Sixty-one percent of those polled indicate that they are "worried about the long-term effects of discrimination against Arab Americans" caused by this situation (See Figure 5). And a surprisingly large 20% note that they have "personally experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity" since September 11 (See Figure 6). Additionally, forty-five percent of all Arab Americans state that they know someone who has experienced such discrimination (See Figure 7).



**Figure 3: Would you support or oppose an all-out war against countries which harbor or aid terrorists who have attacked the U.S.?**



**Figure 4: Are you afraid or not afraid that the terrorist attacks will damage the U.S. economy?**



**Figure 5: Degree of worry about the long term effects of discrimination against Arab Americans.**

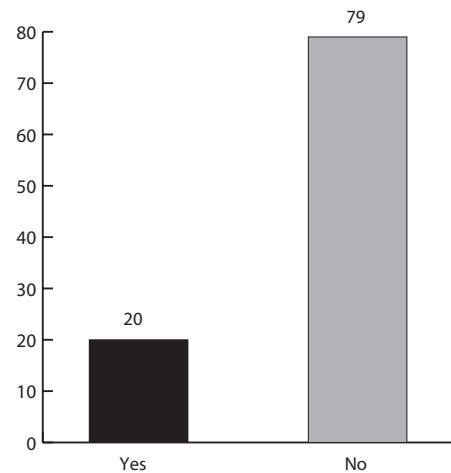
A closer look at how the various subgroups of Arab Americans responded to this question is telling. It is the most vulnerable and visible groups of Arab Americans who are at risk. For example, forty-nine percent of all young Arab Americans between the ages of 18-29 report that they have suffered ethnic-based discrimination since September 11. This includes 45.5% of those who are students. And 37% of all Arab Americans who are Muslim report having experienced such problems.

While almost one-third of all Arab Americans complain that they have experienced some form of ethnic-based discrimination in their lifetime, clearly the September 11 attacks have exacerbated the problem.

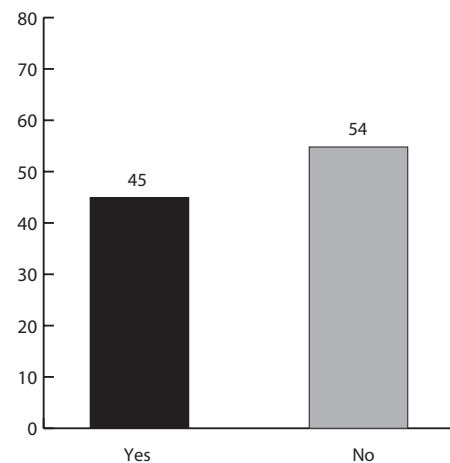
### B. Profiling

The community's concern extends beyond the random acts of bias that have occurred to the practice of "profiling" used by law enforcement agencies. Profiling refers to the practice in which all members of a group who share the characteristics of criminal suspects are stopped or detained for investigation by law enforcement. This practice has been used in the past by airlines who, for a number of years in the mid-1990s, singled out Arab passengers for special security before they were allowed to board planes.

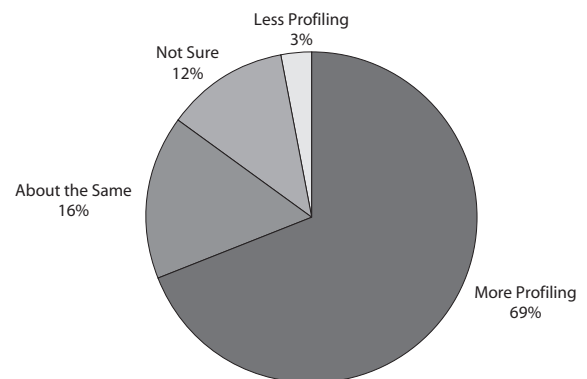
The ZI/AAI poll shows that 69% of Arab Americans believe that profiling of Arab Americans has increased since September 11 (See Figure 8). When asked whether they agreed with the notion that "Arab Americans or Arabic-speaking citizens be detained for profiling by investigators", fifty-eight percent



**Figure 6: Personal experience with discrimination since September 11.**



**Figure 7: Know someone of Arab ethnicity who has experienced discrimination since September 11.**



**Figure 8: More profiling, less profiling, or about the same amount of profiling of Arab Americans since September 11?**

of those polled indicated their disagreement (See Figure 9). A surprisingly large 36% agreed. This may be due to the fact that 54% of Arab Americans apparently feel that while they may disagree with the practice of profiling, they believe that it is justified in the present circumstances (See Figure 10).

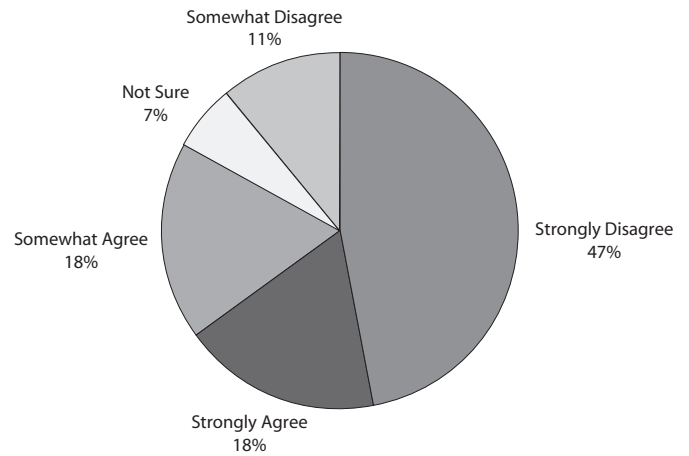
All of this may be due to the fact that Arab Americans feel at risk following the terrorist attacks and feel a need to establish their "bona fides". Indeed, by a margin of 65% to 30%, the Arab Americans polled indicate that they have been embarrassed by the fact that the terrorists who committed the September 11 attacks were of Arab descent (See Figure 11).

### III. Arab Americans and Ethnic Pride

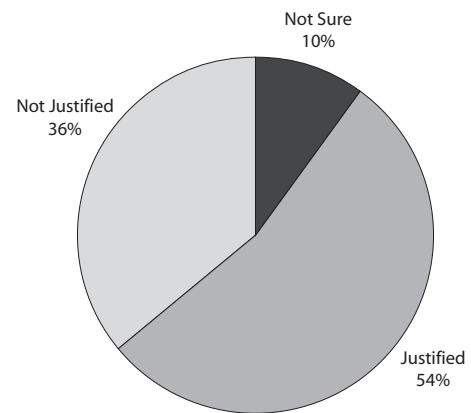
What the ZI/AAI poll clearly establishes is that despite their fears and their embarrassment, Arab Americans retain a strong sense of pride in their ethnic heritage. By a margin of 88% to 4%, those polled say that they are proud of their heritage (See Figure 12). Those numbers are virtually identical to the numbers recorded in a similar poll taken over one and one-half years ago.

Eighty-four percent of Arab Americans state that their ethnic heritage is important in defining their identity. This number is higher than the 79% recorded in the January 2000 ZI poll. Interestingly, the difference is due to a sharp increase in ethnic pride among the native born Arab Americans.

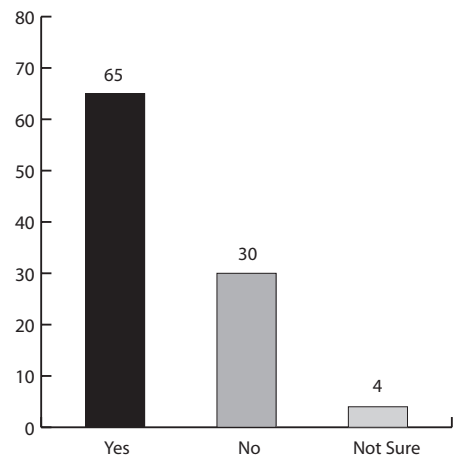
At the same time, Arab Americans continue to display a strong commitment to issues.



**Figure 9: Some people have suggested that Arab Americans or Arabic speaking citizens be detained for profiling by investigators due to the September 11 attacks. Agree or disagree?**



**Figure 10: Justified or not justified for law enforcement to engage in extra questioning and inspections of people with Middle-Eastern accents or features?**



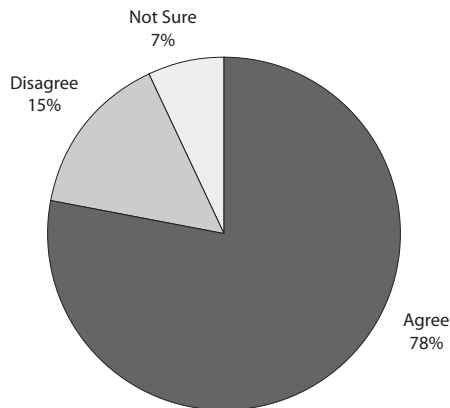
**Figure 11: Are Arab Americans embarrassed because of the attacks were apparently committed by people from Arab countries?**

Eighty-three percent of Arab Americans indicate that securing Palestinian rights is personally important to them (See Figure 13). And when asked whether "a US commitment to settling the Israeli-Palestinian dispute would help the war against terrorism", seventy-eight percent of those polled agreed. Only 15% disagreed (See Figure 14).

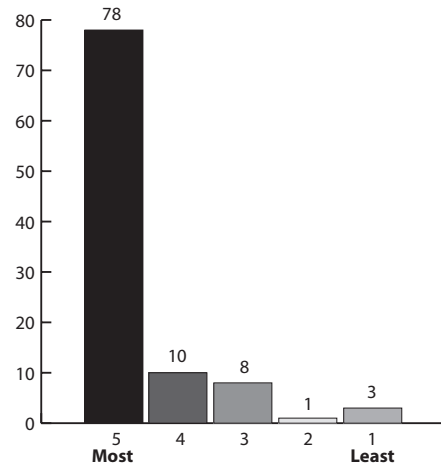
**Conclusion**

This long awaited poll provides an insight into Arab American attitudes at this critical time in US history. It reveals how Arab Americans have reacted to the crisis created by the September 11 attacks. It shows that Arab Americans have responded as Americans, supportive of their President, committed to his goals, afraid for their personal rights and status and, at the same time, strengthened in their attachment to their heritage and their issue concerns as Arab Americans.

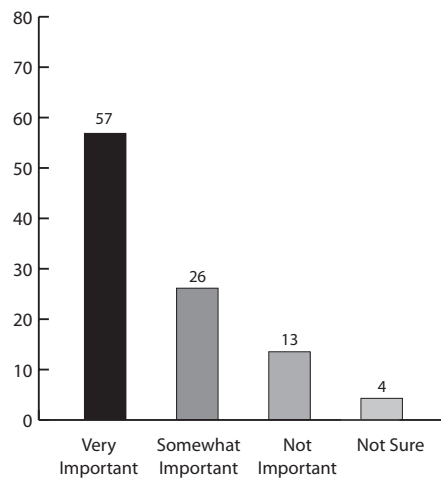
For comments, contact [jzogby@aaiusa.org](mailto:jzogby@aaiusa.org).



**Figure 14: Agree or disagree that a U.S. commitment to settle the Israeli-Palestinian dispute would help the President's efforts in the war against terrorism?**



**Figure 12: Degree of pride in your ethnic heritage.**



**Figure 13: Importance of securing the rights of Palestinians.**