A Profile of the Marshallese Community in Arkansas

VOLUME 3
A Profile of the Marshallese Community in Arkansas describes the results of a 2012 survey of members of the Marshallese community conducted in Springdale, Arkansas. It is the final volume in a three-volume set commissioned by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation in Little Rock. Volume 1, A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas: Changing Workforce and Family Demographics, provides a demographic and socioeconomic profile of immigrants and their children, including a description of immigrant workers. Volume 2, A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas: Economic and Fiscal Benefits and Costs, presents an analysis of immigrants’ impact on the Arkansas economy and on state and local budgets. These three volumes build upon a previous study of the Arkansas immigrant population commissioned and published by the Foundation in 2007.

According to the 2010 Census, out of the estimated 22,400 Marshallese individuals currently living in the United States, 4,300 (19 percent) live in Arkansas. This is up from an estimated population of 2,600 as of the 2000 Census, and within the range of 2,000 to 6,000 established by a Census Bureau survey of the Marshallese in Springdale in 2001. When compared with estimates from the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), the Marshall Islands represent the fourth-largest origin country for Arkansas foreign-born residents after Mexico, El Salvador, and India (see Volume 1). Marshall Islanders have been drawn to Springdale for educational and employment opportunities.

The unique background of the Marshallese population, their concentration in the Springdale area, their contributions to the local workforce and economy, and their potential integration challenges are topics warranting study. Despite their sizable presence in Arkansas, Marshall Islanders were absent from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation’s initial report on immigrants, released in 2007. This was in large part because the analyses for that report (conducted by the Urban Institute) relied on the 2000 Census, which did not gather data on Marshall Islanders as a group separate from Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders (NHPI). Supplementing such limited data with surveys of the Marshallese community in the state was not feasible due to time and personnel constraints. The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation expressed its commitment to address this gap in a future iteration of the study.

For the 2012 update, a face-to-face snowball sample survey was conducted to better understand the Marshallese community in the state of Arkansas. The survey was conducted in several locations in Washington County, primarily in Springdale neighborhoods on and around Oriole Street. It involved reaching out to the community via its leaders, and then asking individual respondents for referrals to additional respondents. A snowball sample is the preferred method for surveying hard-to-reach populations. Methods for reducing bias were followed when conducting the survey.
The survey addressed these questions:

- How well educated is the Marshallese population?
- How well are Marshallese individuals integrated politically?
- What types of jobs do Marshallese individuals hold, and how do they view the Arkansas economy?
- What are their patterns of health insurance and health-care access?

Some key findings from the survey include:

**Educational Attainment**

- Approximately 12 percent of respondents indicated having moved to Arkansas for educational purposes, and the percentage of respondents who identified education as the most important issue for the Marshallese community was even higher, at 18 percent.
- The majority of respondents (61 percent) attended but did not necessarily complete school in the Marshall Islands.
- Thirty-five percent of individuals in the sample indicated not having a high school diploma.

**Political Integration**

- The majority of respondents (57 percent) did not understand or use terms such as “liberal” and “conservative” to define themselves. This was similar to party identification (such as “Democrat” and “Republican”), which 65 percent of respondents did not recognize or use.
- Most respondents (98 percent) did not claim US citizenship, which means they were ineligible to participate in elections. This also reflects the difficult path for Marshallese individuals who want to attain citizenship: They can travel and work in the United States without visas, but are not considered immigrants by the US government. Marshallese individuals must apply for permanent residency and citizenship on the same terms as foreign nationals from other origins.

**Jobs and the Arkansas Economy**

- The largest employer of Marshallese individuals in Springdale is the poultry industry. Approximately 76 percent of respondents reported working for one of three businesses: Tyson Foods, George’s, and Butterball.
- Many respondents were satisfied with their employment prospects in Arkansas, with 50 percent rating the job market’s quality as “good.” Thirty-two percent, however, indicated that there were now too few jobs or too much competition.
Health Insurance and Health-Care Access

• Approximately 63 percent of respondents indicated having health insurance, and, of these, 83 percent said it was provided by their employer. The remaining 17 percent said their insurance came from a family member. By contrast, only 38 percent of Latino immigrants had health insurance in 2008–10, with just 34 percent reporting employer or other private coverage (see Volume 1).

• In spite of the high rate of insurance coverage in the Marshallese community, less than half of respondents (49 percent) rated the quality of their health-care as “good.” The primary reason for being displeased was the cost, with 26 percent of respondents saying health-care was “too expensive.”
I. Introduction

The largest employer of Marshallese individuals in Springdale is the poultry industry. Approximately 76 percent reported working for one of three businesses: Tyson Foods, George’s, and Butterball. Many respondents were satisfied with their employment prospects in Arkansas, with 50 percent rating the job market’s quality as “good.”

In 2007, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation released a two-volume report discussing the key demographic and economic factors influenced by immigrants in Arkansas.1 The first volume of the report focused on the demographic characteristics of immigrants and their families, along with their contributions to the workforce and their impacts on public schools in the state. The report’s second volume described immigrants’ contributions to the Arkansas economy, their purchasing power, tax contributions, and fiscal costs. The report was based on 2000 Census data, with updates where possible through 2005. It was recognized as an objective source of data and widely cited in policy deliberations around immigration and related issues at the state and local levels.

This report updates the previous study with 2010 data. As in the first report, Volume 1 addresses demographic changes, and Volume 2 focuses on economic and fiscal impacts.

This third volume describes the population of Marshall Islanders living in Northwest Arkansas and the issues they confront, based on a survey conducted as part of this project. The individual reports can be downloaded at www.wrfoundation.org.

This report is intended to provide a broad, data-driven description of the state’s immigrant and Marshallese populations for a general audience and to lay the foundation for policy deliberations.

The first volume of the report addresses the following questions:

• How do immigration trends in Arkansas compare with other Southeastern states?

• How are immigrants contributing to population growth and demographic change in Arkansas?

• What are the characteristics of Arkansas immigrants in terms of their countries of origin, legal status, and length of US residence?

• Where do most immigrants live in Arkansas, and are their settlement patterns changing?

• How is immigration affecting public school enrollment in Arkansas?

• How do immigrants — and Latinos overall — fare economically compared to other major population groups in Arkansas?

• How are immigrants and Latinos faring in terms of health insurance coverage and health outcomes?

• How many immigrant workers are there, and what types of jobs do they hold?

• How much do immigrant workers earn, and what are their skill levels?
The second volume focuses on economic and fiscal impacts and addresses the following questions:

- What is the estimated impact of immigrant spending on the state, regional economies, and individual counties?
- What are the major public costs of immigrants to Arkansas?
- What are the direct and indirect immigrant tax contributions to the state?
- What is the net benefit or cost of immigrants on the state budget?
- How important are immigrants to Arkansas’s overall economic output?
- What local business opportunities exist to serve immigrants?
- How will the economic impact of Arkansas immigrants evolve in the future?

This volume, Volume 3, describes the population of Marshall Islanders living in Northwest Arkansas and the issues affecting them, based on a snowball sample survey of that population conducted as part of this project. This volume focuses on the employment, educational attainment, health-care access, and civic integration of the Marshallese community in Springdale, home to more than 80 percent of the Marshallese population in Arkansas. It provides some comparisons with other foreign-born populations in Arkansas, particularly Latinos, and addresses questions such as:

- How well educated is the Marshallese population?
- How well are Marshallese individuals integrated politically?
- What types of jobs do Marshallese individuals hold, and how do they view the Arkansas economy?
- What are their patterns of health insurance and health-care access?

A. How Many Marshall Islanders Live in Arkansas?

As described below, the Marshallese community began building a significant presence in Arkansas in the 1980s, but its recent surge is most striking. It is estimated that the Marshallese population living in the United States increased from 6,700 to 22,400 between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Of the estimated 22,400 Marshallese individuals living in the United States in 2010, 4,300 (19 percent) lived in Arkansas, making it the state with the second-highest share of Marshallese individuals in the country after Hawaii (33 percent). Significant numbers were also found in the states of Washington (10 percent) and California (8 percent).
B. WHAT IS THE CITIZENSHIP AND RESIDENCY STATUS OF MARSHALLESE INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES?

The Marshall Islands are a group of islands in the South Pacific that became independent from the United States in 1986. After World War II, the islands were the setting for tests of nuclear weapons by the US government, which led to documented high levels of radiation and severe health problems in the population. The health effects of nuclear weapons testing led to lawsuits over the course of several decades, and eventually compensation and independence for the Marshallese population.5

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an independent country with full sovereignty in domestic and foreign affairs. Under the Compact of Free Association with the United States, the US government provides defense, social services, and substantial aid to the RMI.4 The Compact sets the terms for Marshallese independence from the United States, conditions for US assistance, and the rules for migration of Marshallese individuals to the United States.

Despite the fact that Marshall Islanders have been relocating to the United States since the 1970s, there have been no systematic attempts to understand the preferences or behaviors of this community. This is not only a result of their comparatively low numbers and localized impact, but of the nebulous legal standing the community has per the terms of the Compact. This nebulous standing necessarily implies that members of the Marshallese community, while sharing some attributes with immigrant groups of various backgrounds, are not themselves “immigrants” in a legal sense.

The Compact, and federal regulations resulting from it, provide Marshallese individuals with the ability to travel to the United States and apply for entry as “nonimmigrants without visas.”5 Because Marshallese individuals hold a nonimmigrant status, the term “immigrants” is not applied to the Marshallese population in this volume. Nonetheless, as noted above, the Marshallese population shares many similarities with populations of immigrants from previous and ongoing waves (those from Latin America, for example), which allows for some comparisons in spite of the differences in legal status.

Marshall Islanders have a long-term presence in Northwest Arkansas. The Compact has granted the aforementioned ability of Marshallese citizens to travel to the United States and seek employment since Marshallese independence. However, those who travel under the terms of the Compact cannot then begin a process of naturalization. To become American citizens, they would need to come into American territory as lawful permanent residents (LPRs) — a status for which they must apply on the same terms as immigrants from other origins.

Almost all the Marshallese individuals living in Arkansas are noncitizens rather than LPRs or US citizens, and they retain Marshallese citizenship (alongside rights to live, work, and study in the United States indefinitely). Their lack of US citizenship or permanent residency has created difficulties in accessing public benefits such as health insurance coverage. At the same
time, the nebulous status of Marshallese individuals may make it more difficult for them to integrate over the long run. Nonetheless, all children born to Marshallese parents on US soil are US citizens, just like other US-born children of foreign-born parents. Thus, the long-term integration prospects for these children may be better than for their parents.

C. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY’S SURVEY OF THE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY IN SPRINGDALE?

The Jones Center for Families and the Arkansas Assessment Initiative conducted a survey of the Marshallese community in Springdale in 2009.6 This survey had a convenience sample of 1,100 individuals, but its focus was solely on improving health services offered to members of the community in Northwest Arkansas. The US Census spearheaded another effort under the Insular Areas Statistical Enhancement Program in 2001. This survey had 541 respondents, and sought primarily to ascertain the size of the Marshallese community and its basic economic and residential characteristics.7

The aforementioned lack of data also stems from the fact that the US Census only recently separated the Marshallese population from Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders. This fact hampered efforts in 2007 by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and The Urban Institute to conduct a comprehensive analysis of immigrants in Arkansas, despite the commitment that the Foundation has always demonstrated in serving the people of Arkansas by making this kind of information available.

For the 2012 update, a face-to-face snowball sample survey was designed to address this gap in our understanding. The survey includes social, political, economic, and demographic questions (see Appendix). The value of this survey is its focus on multiple factors impacting the lives of individuals in this community, instead of one particular issue of interest.

Additionally, it begins a much-needed process of exploring the contours of this community. The community began with one man, John Moody, who left the islands in the 1970s for educational and employment opportunities and then spread the word about Arkansas to relatives and friends. The first significant waves of arrivals began in the 1980s.9 Marshallese individuals who moved to Arkansas, in keeping with our findings, sought not only educational opportunities for their children and better employment for themselves, but also better health-care than was available in the Marshall Islands. Given their community’s long history in Arkansas, a comprehensive attempt to understand their experience is long overdue.
The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an independent country with full sovereignty in domestic and foreign affairs. Under the Compact of Free Association with the United States, the US government provides defense, social services, and substantial aid to the RMI. The Compact sets the terms for Marshallese independence from the United States, conditions for US assistance, and the rules for migration of Marshallese individuals to the United States. The Compact, and federal regulations resulting from it, provide Marshallese individuals with the ability to travel to the United States and apply for entry as “nonimmigrants without visas.”
A. How Is the Marshallese Population Defined?

The Marshallese population consists of individuals born in the Marshall Islands and their children. Under the Compact of Free Association, Marshallese individuals can travel to and work in the United States as nonimmigrants without visas. This means that they have greater rights in the United States than unauthorized immigrants, but not the path to citizenship of immigrant populations that can become permanent residents. The children of Marshall Islanders automatically become US citizens if born in the United States, just as do other children born in the United States to foreign-born parents.

The Marshallese population surveyed for this study consists of first-generation adults and youths, ages 16 and over, many with US-born children. The mean age of the sample was 34.

B. How and Where Was the Survey Conducted?

As a relatively tight-knit group with preferences and needs that are distinct from those of individuals from different backgrounds, the Marshallese community is emblematic of the type of population best sampled using a snowball method. Snowball sampling is a well-established and preferred method for surveying populations with a high degree of residential concentration, such as the Marshallese population in Arkansas. While this sampling technique limits the inferences that can be made about individuals in the Marshallese community at large and therefore cannot be considered completely representative, it has many strengths. As is the case with all exploratory work in the social sciences, these data can frame future phenomena to be explored, or help to refine future questions to be asked. Furthermore, steps to reduce bias exist and were followed for the purposes of this report.

In contrast to other nonprobability sampling techniques where the researcher selects participants based on convenient access or a predetermined quota for certain characteristics, in snowball sampling the researcher relies on respondents to name future respondents. This effectively decreases any potential bias in selection on the part of the researcher. Additionally, omission bias is reduced because the degree of independence between one respondent and the next is increased. The result is a sample that, while still possessing an unknown probability of having included any member of the population, is likely more representative, thus increasing our confidence in the findings. The “zero stage” consisted of 85 individuals who were approached by the interviewer. Once they completed the survey, they were asked to name two other individuals they knew who might be interested in participating in the survey.

Although 170 new contacts were expected from this procedure, only 35 were obtained. Most respondents were unwilling or unable to name two other members of the community. Several likely reasons include the interviewer’s status as an outsider to the community, a language barrier, and resistance to participating after prior experiences with surveys from which no
benefit was perceived. After 20 outright rejections, the response rate was 44 percent (120 surveys answered out of 275 “requested”). The low response rate and the fact that the survey was conducted in English, not Marshallese, means that the survey may not be representative of the Marshallese population in Springdale as a whole.

The surveys were carried out from April 13 to May 27, 2012, in several locations across Washington County, including the Washington County Department of Health (1 respondent), RMI Consulate (2), Cross Church (20), Lake Fayetteville Baseball Fields (23), and the Oriole Street neighborhood in Springdale (74).

The choice to restrict data collection to sites to Washington County was made to both constrain costs and to focus on the largest population: The 2010 US Census estimates that 88 percent of Marshallese individuals who live in the state of Arkansas reside in Washington County. Respondents gave pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.
A major integration challenge lies in the lack of US citizenship and permanent residency for first-generation Marshall Islanders. Lack of citizenship status prevents voting in Arkansas and thus slows civic integration. Lack of status as immigrants or permanent residents can create barriers to accessing public benefits such as health insurance. The nebulous legal status of Marshallese individuals may also make long-run economic integration challenging. The second generation of US-born children with Marshallese parents, however, does not face the same citizenship and status restrictions, and is likely to integrate more fully.
III. Findings

A. HOW WELL EDUCATED IS THE MARSHALLESE POPULATION?

Approximately 12 percent of the Marshallese survey respondents indicated having moved to Arkansas for educational purposes. The percentage of respondents who identified “education” as the most important issue for the Marshallese community was even higher, at 18 percent.

Nevertheless, there was a relatively high incidence of high school noncompletion. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that they did not have a high school diploma or equivalent. While less than 15 percent of adults in the United States lack a high school degree or equivalent, this statistic for the Marshallese community compares favorably with national averages for immigrant workers, of which over 40 percent have less than a high school education. It also compares favorably with Latino immigrant adults statewide in Arkansas, 61 percent of whom lacked a high school education in 2010. On the other hand, only 20 percent of all non-Latino immigrants in Arkansas (including whites and the broader Asian–Pacific Islander population) lacked a high school education (see Volume 1).

The favorable educational attainment profile of the Marshallese individuals in the survey may in part owe to survey response bias, as high school graduates or those with a higher level of education are more likely to participate in survey research. This may be due to their confidence in being able to express their views.15

One challenge to educational attainment is language proficiency. Sixty-one percent of respondents indicated that they attained their highest level of education in the Marshall Islands. Once in Arkansas, completion of high school or the GED is prohibitive in terms of time and cost for individuals who are of working age and in need of income. Those who obtained their education in the Marshall Islands may experience difficulty with transferring degrees and credentials to the United States, as do many US immigrants (see Volume 1).16

Slightly more than half of respondents (51 percent) had only a high school education, and an additional 9 percent had gone on to some years in college. Just 2 percent of respondents had an associate’s degree, and only 3 percent had a bachelor’s degree. No respondents indicated having gone on to graduate school.

These are slightly lower attainment rates than those of Latino immigrants, 5 percent of whom had at least a bachelor’s degree statewide in 2010. White and Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants in the state were much better educated overall: one-third had at least a four-year college degree.17 The lower rate of postsecondary education among the Marshallese survey respondents could partially be due to sampling; most of the interviews were conducted in working-class neighborhoods in Springdale where college-educated immigrants are less likely to live. On the other hand, the survey was conducted in English and not Marshallese, and so the results may underrepresent the least educated Marshallese adults who are also likely to have the lowest levels of English proficiency.
B. HOW WELL ARE MARSHALLESE INDIVIDUALS INTEGRATED POLITICALLY?

In keeping with findings on the general American population, the Marshallese individuals surveyed were not political ideologues. When asked if they used the terms “liberal” or “conservative” to define themselves, those who did not skip the question outright asked for a definition. Provided with a bare-bones definition contrasting a preference for individual liberty and societal change with a preference for family and traditional values (respectively), the majority of respondents were still not sure. In total, 57 percent of respondents did not choose a label. Part of the explanation for their lack of political ideation could be the relatively low educational attainment of the Marshallese adults included in the survey.

Approximately 23 percent identified themselves as “liberal” and 18 percent as “conservative.” Among those who chose an ideological label, the reasons given were unsurprising. Seventy-five percent of those who chose the “liberal” label, for example, did so because of a concern for personal freedoms or social progressivism. A full 95 percent of those who chose the “conservative” label did so out of a concern for maintaining family values or due to their religious convictions in general. Finally, 3 percent of respondents claimed to be ideologically “mixed,” citing social conservatism and political liberalism.

More striking was the lack of awareness of the two major political parties in the United States — 65 percent of respondents did not know about the two parties. Meanwhile, 13 percent identified with the Democratic Party and 8 percent identified with the Republican Party. Explanations for these choices included liking a particular politician from a party (6 percent), liking aspects of the party’s platform (4 percent), or simply adhering to the party of family members or acquaintances (7 percent).

This reflects how little political parties and groups reach out to immigrants, minority groups, and low-income individuals. Political parties especially, but all political organizations in general, are understood to be “strategic mobilizers.” They allocate their resources to those individuals who are likely to get involved, and who are likely to agree with their policy preferences.

Most respondents (98 percent) did not claim US citizenship, which means that they would be ineligible to participate in elections. Clearly this diminishes the utility of following politics, and perhaps makes knowing about the parties unnecessary. However, social identification with the parties and nonelectoral political participation are still instrumental in advancing individual and community interests.

Additionally, several respondents made reference to their children being citizens, or to being eligible for citizenship but not having begun the paperwork. As noted earlier, Marshallese individuals seeking citizenship face a difficult path. A Marshallese citizen can choose to begin the formal US immigration process from the Marshall Islands, but is then subject to the same eligibility requirements and the same amount of waiting time as foreign nationals from other countries. Some Marshallese individuals in the United States may also apply for permanent
US residency and eventually citizenship through a US citizen child (over age 21), by joining the armed services, or by marrying a US citizen.

C. WHAT TYPES OF JOBS DO MARSHALLESE INDIVIDUALS HOLD AND HOW DO THEY VIEW THE ARKANSAS ECONOMY?

Fifteen percent of respondents said they moved to Arkansas for jobs, and an additional 9 percent mentioned “better opportunities” in general. Finally, only 2 percent directly named “finances” as the top reason for their move. To further highlight the importance of the job market to the lives of individuals in the Marshallese community, it is necessary to note that 26 percent of respondents stated that “jobs” was the top issue affecting them (10 percent said “finances”).

The largest employer, by far, of the Marshallese community is the poultry industry. Seventy-six percent of the 120 survey respondents reported working for one of three businesses: Tyson Foods, George’s, and Butterball. The geographic concentration of the survey in particular neighborhoods, along with the fact it was conducted in English and not Marshallese, may have led to overrepresentation of those Marshallese workers employed in the manufacturing sector and underrepresentation of those employed in less formal sectors of the economy.

Nonetheless, the prevalence of Marshallese employment in poultry processing is an interesting finding that parallels the historical experiences of other immigrant communities in Arkansas, including the Latino immigrant community. Immigrants with relatively low levels of formal education tend to concentrate in those industries that have a need for low-skilled labor. Such industries also usually provide recent immigrants’ first job opportunities. In
Arkansas manufacturing and especially poultry processing have been the main sectors of low-skilled immigrant employment historically, though more recently construction has emerged as a second major sector for Latinos (see Volume 1). It is not until later generations, on average, that individuals from immigrant communities begin to diversify their means of economic support.

Most respondents (50 percent) rated the job market in Arkansas as “good.” This interesting finding reflects the continued demand for labor generated by Tyson Foods and several other employers in the region. One respondent, “Anthony,” said a friend referred him for the job he currently has at a wastewater facility and that only two days lapsed between his application and being hired. Another respondent, “Talbert,” described getting a job in Arkansas as “pretty easy,” and said only three to four days passed between his application and being hired.

However, 32 percent of the Marshallese survey participants indicated that, in part because of the economic downturn, there were now too few jobs or too much competition. There were also perceived instances of language discrimination (3 percent) and an employer preference for higher education levels (6 percent). Finally, 3 percent of respondents expressed ambivalence about the quality of the job market in Arkansas, saying it was “neither good nor bad.”

D. WHAT ARE PATTERNS OF HEALTH INSURANCE AND HEALTH-CARE ACCESS FOR THE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY?

Only 4 percent of respondents said they moved to Arkansas for health-care, and only two individuals mentioned the nuclear testing in the RMI as a contributor to health concerns. One such individual explained, “Marshall Islands is a nuclear testing zone since 1945.” Nevertheless, when asked what issue most impacted members of the community, 18 percent said “health.”

Approximately 63 percent of respondents indicated having health insurance, and, of these, 83 percent said it was provided by their employer. By contrast, only 38 percent of Latino immigrants had health insurance in 2008–10, with just 34 percent reporting employer or other private coverage. The relatively high rate of employer coverage in the survey sample suggests that the major employers of the Marshallese community in Springdale — the poultry-processing plants — often provide benefits for their workers. Indeed, 77 percent of all immigrants working in animal-processing plants statewide in 2008–10 had employer-provided coverage (see Volume 1). If Marshallese individuals who are unemployed or employed in other sectors were underrepresented in the study, it is possible that the true rate of employer health coverage in the community could be lower.

The remaining 17 percent said that their insurance came from a family member. There was little or no public coverage in the sample, although under the terms of the Compact, Marshallese individuals should be eligible for Medicaid and other federally funded health insurance programs. That so few in the Marshallese community in Northwest Arkansas
receive public health insurance coverage may be a function of the fact that Arkansas has not passed legislation or enacted regulations extending coverage to them — despite the terms of the Compact.

Although almost two-thirds of the respondents had health insurance coverage, less than half of the respondents (49 percent) rated the quality of their health-care as “good.” They were primarily displeased by the cost, with 26 percent of respondents saying that health-care was “too expensive.” Only 3 percent stated that the quality of health-care available to them was “bad” in general. Finally, 6 percent of respondents were ambivalent, indicating that the health-care available to them was “neither good nor bad.” Such respondents cited a high quality of care, counterbalanced by high costs and long wait times.
The Marshallese community exhibits many of the qualities that social science researchers have, for decades, identified as emblematic of immigrant communities. These qualities are both assets and liabilities. Ethnic concentration, for example, which has occurred in the city of Springdale, provides recent arrivals with information, social connections, and employment opportunities (for instance, at the poultry-processing plants in the area). This concentration may stem from the community’s relatively short tenure in Arkansas and the fact that the community grew from a single individual who came to Springdale in search of educational and employment opportunities. However, this concentration makes it difficult to improve one’s income and educational attainment in the short run; socioeconomic improvement must frequently wait until the second or third generation. Even as social connections are an important first step toward integration, the erroneous perception that a given immigrant community is largely separate from American society at large limits its members’ opportunities for political and civic involvement.

The most significant similarity between the Marshallese community and immigrant communities throughout American history is members’ desire to work hard to improve their lives and the lives of their children. It is not uncommon to face severe obstacles along the way. For example, several respondents indicated that they perceived discrimination in dealings with police and in hiring practices. One female respondent, “Ethel,” stated that “police will pull over cars that are clearly Marshallese.” Two respondents, “Joey” and “Bubble Gum,” compared Springdale unfavorably with Salem, Oregon, because the city, unlike Salem, does not have a human rights commission that actively addresses discrimination in employment and other areas. Members of the community are also aware that the community faces challenges in terms of educational attainment and health outcomes.

Another major integration challenge lies in the lack of US citizenship and permanent residency for first-generation Marshall Islanders. Lack of citizenship status prevents voting in Arkansas and thus slows civic integration. Lack of status as immigrants or permanent residents can create barriers to accessing public benefits such as health insurance. The nebulous legal status of Marshallese individuals may also make long-run economic integration challenging. The second generation of US-born children with Marshallese parents, however, does not face the same citizenship and status restrictions, and is likely to integrate more fully.

Despite these citizenship and status concerns, once the immediate needs of the Marshallese community are addressed, deeper integration will be facilitated. It is impossible, of course, to provide a specific time frame for integration, and it will likely proceed at different rates for different individuals. Like immigrant communities both historical and contemporary, however, improvement will be the rule rather than the exception. This is especially so because, as noted earlier, children born on American soil will enjoy the benefits of citizenship and language proficiency, which can only improve their labor market prospects and social mobility.
2012 SOCIO-POLITICAL SURVEY OF THE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I would like to remind you at this time that all the information you share will be anonymous and your identity kept confidential. I will begin with some routine demographic questions that will help in comparing all respondents before moving to the portion of the interview, hoping to understand your socio-political preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. You are free to skip any question you do not feel comfortable discussing. Please provide as much detail as possible when responding.

PARTICIPANT’S SEX:

FIRST NAME (LAST NAME OPTIONAL):

CITY OF RESIDENCE:

DATE:

1) WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

2) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF? (Marshallese, Asian-Pacific Islander, American, or something else)

3) WHERE WERE YOU BORN? If born outside the area, why did you choose to move to Northwest Arkansas?

4) WHAT ISSUES DO YOU THINK MOST AFFECT THE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS? How, or why?

5) WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION? (Some high school, high school graduate, some college but no degree, college graduate, graduate school, or other)

6) WHERE DID YOU COMPLETE YOUR EDUCATION? (Arkansas, somewhere else in United States, outside United States)

7) ARE YOU MARRIED? (yes/no)

   a) If married: Are you living with your spouse? (yes/no)

   b) If not married: Are you living with a boyfriend/girlfriend? (yes/no)

8) DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN LIVING WITH YOU? (yes/no)

   a) If yes: How many children are living with you?

   b) If yes: How many of these children are in school here in Arkansas? (number)

   c) If yes: How do you feel about the quality of education your children are receiving here in Arkansas?
9) ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING? (yes/no)

   a) If yes: What type of job are you currently doing? (occupation)

   b) If yes: Where are you currently working? (name of job/industry)

   c) If no: When was the last time you worked?

   d) If no: What type of job were you doing when you worked last?

10) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE JOB MARKET IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS PERSONALLY, AND FOR THE MARSHALLESE COMMUNITY AT LARGE? Why?

11) ARE YOU A US CITIZEN (yes/no)?

   a) What year was the last presidential election in the United States that you participated in? Whom did you vote for, and why?

12) SOME PEOPLE CONSIDER THEMSELVES “LIBERAL,” OTHERS CONSIDER THEMSELVES “CONSERVATIVE,” WHILE SOME DO NOT USE EITHER OF THESE TWO TERMS. DO YOU USE ONE OF THESE TERMS TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF, IF SO, WHICH ONE AND WHY?

13) GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A DEMOCRAT, A REPUBLICAN, OR AN INDEPENDENT? Why?

14) DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE? (yes/no)

   a) If yes: Who provides your health insurance coverage? (employer, another family member, government, you purchased it)

   b) If no: Have you tried to apply for public health-care insurance recently and been unable to get it? (yes/no)

15) How would you describe the quality of health-care available to you and your ability to access it? Please include any difficulties you have had in obtaining health insurance as well as in finding a doctor or getting health-care in an emergency.
Endnotes


11. A future iteration of this survey would benefit from having a version in Marshallse available for those who are not English proficient.

12. Marshallse community leaders expressed concern that previous survey takers had misrepresented data about their community, particularly in the area of health-care. Thus, the level of distrust that was exhibited by some members of the community was expected.

13. The 120 surveys answered include the 85 in the zero stage and 35 referrals. The 275 requested includes the 120 surveys answered, the 20 outright rejections, and the 135 contacts expected but not obtained.


17. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the American Community Survey 2008–10, pooled.


Children of immigrants: Children with at least one immigrant parent. Children can be either first generation (foreign-born) or second generation (US-born).

Crowded housing: Households with more than one person per room.

English learners: Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the K–12 public schools.

Federal poverty level (FPL): A threshold for economic need set by the federal government according to household size and income. In 2009, the poverty level was $22,050 for a family of four.

Foreign-born: See immigrants.

Housing cost burden: Total housing costs (rent or mortgage plus utilities and other housing costs) are considered moderate if they are greater than 30 percent of monthly income.

Immigrants: People born outside the United States and not born to American parents. Does not include people born in Puerto Rico, Guam, or other US territories. Includes both naturalized citizens and noncitizens.

Immigrant households: Households in which the head (usually the adult who pays the bills) and/or the spouse of the head is an immigrant (or both are immigrants); other members could be immigrants or US-born.

Lawful permanent residents (LPRs): Noncitizens admitted legally for permanent residency, usually through family ties, employment, or as refugees. Legal permanent residents are sometimes known as green-card holders.

Limited English proficient (LEP): In the general population, people who speak a language other than English as their primary language and who do not speak English very well. In the public schools, LEP students are those who are foreign-born, Native American, or migrant, or who otherwise come from an environment in which a language other than English affects their English proficiency, and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English affect their classroom performance and achievement on state tests.


Naturalized citizens: Legal permanent residents who have become US citizens, usually after passing the citizenship test. The waiting period to take the citizenship test is five years for most permanent residents and three years for those married to US citizens.

Noncitizens: Immigrants who have not yet become citizens. Noncitizens can be unauthorized immigrants, legal permanent residents, or, in a small number of cases, students and others with temporary visas or protection from removal.

Unauthorized immigrants: Noncitizens who entered illegally, usually across the border from Mexico, or who entered legally but overstayed their visas.

US-born: People born in the United States or its territories (such as Puerto Rico and Guam), or born abroad to US citizen parents.

US-born households: Households in which neither the head nor the head’s spouse is an immigrant.
Works Cited


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Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation for its strong support of this project. In particular, he thanks President Sherece West, Vice President Cory Anderson, and Senior Program Associate Regan Moffitt for their guidance, direction, and wisdom in planning and executing the study. The report was reviewed by Audrey Singer of the Brookings Institution and Joel Anderson of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The Foundation’s board also provided feedback. The author also acknowledges Joy Moore of JWS Media Consulting for assistance in developing the report’s key messages and themes. Fayre Makeig edited the final report.

The author would like to thank Carmen Chong Gum, Consul General of the Republic of the Marshall Islands; Sandy Harris Joel at Credit Counseling of Arkansas; and Grace Donoho, with the Gaps in Service to the Marshallese Task Force, for facilitating contact with the Marshallese community in Springdale. The author also expresses his appreciation to the members of the Marshallese community for their participation in the survey.

The methods and findings of the report were reviewed by an advisory group composed of experts from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors in Arkansas. Members included:

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• Diana Gonzales Worthen, Director, Project Teach Them All, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
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• Logan Hampton, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
• Adjoa Aiyetoro, Founding Director, Institute for Race and Ethnicity, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
To read the three volumes of *A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas* commissioned by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation that analyze the population of immigrants and Marshall Islanders in Arkansas, visit www.wrfoundation.org.