



Polling Summary: Public Support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

July 2006

In the last many months immigration reform has rapidly risen to be a “top of mind” issue for the American public. In December, 2005, the House passed a harsh immigration enforcement package with far-reaching provisions that include criminalizing undocumented immigrants and those who assist them. In March, 2006, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed a comprehensive package that combined tough enforcement with provisions to take the pressure off the border by expanding legal avenues for immigrants coming in the future and a path to legal status for many of the 12 million undocumented immigrants now living in the U.S.. In May, 2006, the Senate passed a measure similar to the Judiciary Committee bill.

The American public wants action from Congress, and many politicians and pundits claim that what the public wants is to continue our current “get-tough and get-tough only” policy, consistent with the House bill. In fact, a more careful reading of public opinion research indicates strong support for a more intelligent and realistic approach to controlling immigration, including enhanced border security, workplace and employer enforcement, earned legalization for undocumented immigrants with a path to citizenship, and expanded visas for future immigrant workers and families.

I. Polling of the General Public

NBC/Wall Street Journal (June 9-12, 2006)

A national poll of 1,002 adults conducted by the polling organizations of Peter Hart (D) and Bill McInturff (R) (MoE \pm 3.1).

When asked to choose between a plan similar to the **House immigration plan** (seven-hundred-mile fence along the border with Mexico to help keep illegal immigrants from entering the United States, and deporting immigrants who are already in the United States illegally) and a plan similar to the **Senate immigration plan** (a three-hundred-and-seventy-mile fence along the border with Mexico to help keep illegal immigrants from entering the United States, and a guest worker program to allow illegal immigrants who have jobs and who have been here for more than two years to remain in the United States), **the preference of voters for the Senate plan was clear:**

- **One third (33%) favored the House plan;**
- **One half (50%) favored the Senate plan;**
- Fourteen percent favored neither; and
- Three percent are unsure.

CBS News (May 16-17, 2006)

A national poll of 636 adults (MoE \pm 4).

- **77% – More than three quarters of Americans (77%) favored a plan allowing illegal immigrants** who have paid a fine, been in the U.S. for at least five years, paid any back taxes

they owe, can speak English, and have no criminal record **to stay and work in the United States**, while only 19% oppose.

CNN/Opinion Research Corp. (May 16-17, 2006)

A national poll of 1,012 adults.

- **79% – Almost 8 in 10 Americans (79%) favored allowing illegal immigrants already living in the United States for a number of years to stay in this country and apply for U.S. citizenship** if they had a job and paid back taxes. Eighteen percent opposed such a measure.

CNN/Opinion Research Corp. (April 21-23, 2006)

A national poll of 1,012 adults.

- **77% – More than three-quarters of Americans (77%) favored allowing illegal immigrants who have been in United States for more than five years to stay and apply for citizenship** if they have a job and pay a fine and back taxes. Twenty percent said they opposed such a measure.
- A majority opposed a proposal to allow illegal immigrants who have been in the United States for two to five years to stay on a temporary basis, without a chance to apply for U.S. citizenship. Fifty-four percent opposed that measure, and 40 % favored it.
- A majority (56 %) opposed making illegal immigration a felony, while 39 % favored it.

Democracy Corps/Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (April 20-24, 2006)

A national poll of 1,000 “likely” voters.

- **75% – Three-quarters favor a “guest worker” program that allows immigrants to work in the U.S. and offers them an opportunity to apply for citizenship if they pay fines and back taxes.** Forty percent strongly favor this approach while 22% oppose it.

Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg (April 8-12, 2006)

A national poll of 1,357 adults.

- **63% – Sixty-three percent of Americans select an approach to immigration laws that includes both tougher enforcement and a “guest worker” program.**

Gallup/USA Today (April 7-9, 2006)

A national poll of 1,004 adults.

- **75%** – Three-quarters of the American people feel it is important that the government take steps this year to deal with the large number of illegal immigrants already living in the country (34% think this “very important”).
- **63%** – Sixty-three percent believe the government should deal with illegal immigrants by allowing immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become U.S. citizens if they meet certain requirements.

ABC News/Washington Post (April 6-9, 2006)

A national survey of 1,027 adults.

- **63%** – Sixty-three percent select a plan that allows illegal immigrants to become citizens if they meet certain conditions.

TIME Magazine/SRBI (March 29-30, 2006)

A national poll of 1,004 adults.

More Border Security *and* More Legality

Americans want both enhanced border security, workplace and employer enforcement, and less illegality, *and they simultaneously* want more legality in the immigration system.

- **79%** favor allowing illegal immigrants to register as “guest-workers.”
- **78%** favor allowing illegal immigrants in the U.S. to gain citizenship if they learn English, have a job and pay taxes.
- 82% say the U.S. is not doing enough to keep “illegals,” from entering the country.
- 71% favor providing and enforcing penalties for employers convicted of hiring illegal immigrants.
- A majority (62%) favor stopping illegal immigrants from entering the U.S. “by whatever steps necessary.”
- A minority (47%) support deporting all illegal immigrants.

House vs. Senate

TIME finds a lopsided majority in favor of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s approach to immigration reform that allows illegal immigrants to get a temporary work visa in a head-to-head comparison with the House’s approach to criminalize illegal presence and bar any current immigrants from ever legally working or staying in the U.S.

- **25%** – Only 1-in-4 support the more drastic House version, with 72% favoring the temporary work visa approach (66% of Republicans, 75% of Democrats, and 73% of Independents).
- Less than a third of Republicans (32%) favor the House approach.

Associated Press/Ipsos Public Affairs (March 28-30, 2006)

A national poll of 1,003 adults, 796 registered voters.

- **56%** – A majority of Americans (56%) favor allowing immigrants who are in the United States illegally to apply for legal, temporary worker status, with 41% opposed.

FOX News/Opinion Dynamics (March 24-26, 2006)

A national poll.

- **62%** favor, **31%** oppose the following: Do you favor or oppose allowing illegal or undocumented immigrants who have jobs in the United States to apply for legal, temporary-worker status?

TIME Magazine/SRBI (January 24-26, 2006)

A national poll of 1,002 adults.

- **76%** – About 3-in-4 Americans (76%) favor allowing illegal immigrants in the U.S. citizenship if they learn English, have a job and pay taxes.

Washington Post/ABC (December 15-18, 2005)

A poll of 1,007 adult Americans.

- **61%** – Sixty-one percent said undocumented immigrants should be able to keep their jobs and apply for legal status, compared to 36% who thought they should be deported.

II. Polling of Republican Voters

Tarrance Group/Manhattan Institute (June 12-15, 2006)

A national poll of 804 “likely” Republican voters.

- **75%** – Three quarters of likely Republican voters support passage of a comprehensive immigration reform plan that contains the following elements:
 - Provide resources to greatly increase border security;
 - impose much tougher penalties on employers who hire illegal workers;
 - allow additional foreign workers to come to the United States to work for a temporary period;

- create a system in which illegal immigrants could come forward and register, pay a fine, and receive a temporary worker permit; and
 - provide these temporary workers with a multi-year path to earned citizenship, if they get to the end of the line and meet certain requirements like living crime free, learning English, paying taxes.
- **Support for this plan is strong even among base Republican voter demographics like strong Republicans (77%), very conservative Republicans (72%), white conservative Christians (76%), and those who listen to news talk radio on a daily basis (72%).**
 - **A strong majority (60%) of likely Republican voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who supports this type of plan.**

Tarrance Group/Manhattan Institute (October 2-5, 2005)

A poll of 807 registered “likely” Republican voters conducted by the Tarrance Group for the Manhattan Institute.

- **72% -- More than seven-in-ten (72%) likely Republican voters favor an earned legalization immigration reform plan that would:**
 - Provide resources to greatly increase border security;
 - impose much tougher penalties on employers who hire illegal worker;
 - create a system in which illegal immigrants could come forward and register, pay a fine, and receive a temporary worker permit; and
 - provide these temporary workers with a multi-year path to citizenship, if they meet certain requirements like living crime free, learning English, and paying taxes.
- **Only 21% of likely Republican voters oppose this reform plan and 7% are unsure.**
- **71% -- Seventy one percent of likely Republican voters say they would be more likely to support their Member of Congress or a candidate for Congress who supported this reform plan.**

III. Polling of Latino Citizens

Latino Policy Coalition/Lake Research Partners (April 20-26, 2006)

Survey of 1000 Latino adults in 23 states with the highest Latino population.

- **80% -- Eight in 10 Latino registered voters favor an earned citizenship program that allows immigrants in the U.S. to gain eventual citizenship by paying a fine, learning English and U.S. history, and paying all owed taxes. This includes 65% of Latino registered voters who support it strongly.**

- Support is similarly robust (80%) for a guest worker program that would allow immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally to apply for work permits allowing them to stay and work in the U.S. Two-thirds of Latino registered voters (67%) support this proposal strongly.
- By wide margins, a majority of Latino voters would prefer to allow illegal immigrants to become U.S. citizens if they meet certain requirements, rather than make illegal immigrants felons or become guest workers for a limited amount of time.
- When given a choice, 61% favor allowing illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become U.S. citizens, but only if they meet certain requirements like working and paying back taxes over a period of time. Fifteen percent of Latino voters prefer to have a guest worker program that allows immigrants to remain in the U.S. in order to work, but only for a limited amount of time, and just 16% favor making all illegal immigrants felons and send them back to their home country.

IV. Polls of Undocumented Latino Immigrants

Bendixen & Associates (October 11-15, 2005)

Long-form, one-on-one interviews with 233 undocumented, Latin American immigrants in Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles, conducted in Spanish for the Manhattan Institute and the National Immigration Forum.

- If the government of the United States approved a new law that would allow the undocumented to legalize their status, would you make an effort to become legal or is it just easier to remain undocumented? **Almost all (98%) would make an effort to become legal.**
- Would you be willing to go to a government office, admit that you were here illegally and give them your real name and other information if this was the first step to legalize your status? **Almost all (94%) would report themselves to a government office.**
- Would you be willing to notify the government of any address changes during the time your status was being legalized? **Almost all (99%) would notify.**
- Would you be willing to be fingerprinted and agree to a criminal background check as part of the process that would legalize your status? **Almost all (96%) would submit to a criminal background check and fingerprinting.**
- Would you be willing to pay a fine of \$1,000 to the government as a condition to begin the process of legalizing your status? **Nine out of 10 (91%) would pay a \$1,000 fine.**
- What if the fine were \$2,000? **A majority (58%) would pay a \$2,000 fine.**
- Would you be willing to enroll in a class that would help you learn English as part of the process that would legalize your status? **Nine out of 10 (87%) would enroll in English classes.**
- Would you be willing to pay any taxes you owe as part of the process to legalize your status? **Seven out of 10 (70%) would be willing to pay back taxes.**
- Let's summarize...the new law would require you to do all of the things we discussed...if the new law was approved, would you make the effort to legalize your status or is it easier to remain undocumented? **Nine out 10 (92%) would go through all of these steps in an effort to legalize.**