Public Opinion on Immigration

Pluralities of the public:
- Want immigration reduced
- Have sympathy for illegal immigrants
- See both positive & negative aspects of immigration
- Want to allow illegal immigrants a route to citizenship
- Favor the Arizona identity check law

Opinion on Legal Immigration

Sympathy for Illegal Immigrants

“Which comes closest to your view about illegal immigrants who are currently working in the U.S.? They should be allowed to stay in their jobs and to eventually apply for U.S. citizenship. OR, They should be allowed to stay in their jobs only as guest workers, but not to apply for U.S. citizenship. OR, They should be required to leave their jobs and leave the U.S.”


“As you may know, the state of Arizona recently passed a law that gives the police the power to question anyone they suspect is in the country illegally, requires people to produce documents verifying their status if asked, and allows officers to detain anyone who cannot do so. Do you think this law goes too far in dealing with the issue of illegal immigration, doesn’t go far enough, or is it about right?”

In the community where you live, would you say that immigration has had a positive effect, a negative effect, or no real effect at all on ...?

- The culture and character of the community: 41% positive, 17% negative, 43% no effect
- The availability of jobs: 17% positive, 20% negative, 62% no effect
- The prices of everyday goods and services: 19% positive, 20% negative, 59% no effect
- Hospitals and public schools: 16% positive, 18% negative, 64% no effect

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, April 2006

Comprehensive Immigration Reform, 2006

"I'm going to describe a portion of a possible new immigration law, which also would include tighter border security. This law would deal with immigrants who are here illegally in three ways, depending on how long they have been in the United States. Those who have been here for more than five years would be allowed to continue to work here for six years, and then would be allowed to apply for permanent citizenship. Those who have been here for two to five years would be required to go to a legal border entry point and register sometime in the next three years, and would then be able to return to work. Those who have been here for less than two years would be required to return to their home country and apply for entry into the United States through the normal legal channels.

"Thinking about the portion of a possible immigration law I just described, would you favor or oppose this?"

Economic Considerations

- **Low cost labor**: farms, hotels, restaurants, service workers, construction, high tech jobs
  - Increasing supply of workers drives down the cost of labor
  - Employers win
  - Workers lose
  - Consumers win

- **Immigrants compete for jobs with Americans**

- **Benefits to taxpayers**
  - Illegal immigrants pay taxes/social security, but are less likely to collect benefits

- **Costs to taxpayers**
  - Education, emergency healthcare, crime

- **Net benefits are positive, but small according to most studies by economists**

- **Costs & benefits differ geographically**
  - Some areas are net winners (e.g., eastern Washington)
  - Some areas are net losers (e.g., southern California)
Other Considerations

- Should we continue to build a wall along the border
- Should illegal immigration be a felony
- Should Feds pay states for costs of illegal immigrants—schools, healthcare, prisons, …
- Should we change the priorities for family members, or expand the definition of close family members

Other Considerations

- Should the U.S. develop a tamper-proof identity card & require all people to carry them?
- Should the children of illegal immigrants born in the U.S. be U.S. citizens?

Ethnic & Racial Prejudice

- Racial/ethnic prejudices clearly cause people to take anti-immigrant stands
- But economic competition & other non-prejudice reasons also contribute to anti-immigrant opinions
- One side says it’s all prejudice; the other side says prejudice is irrelevant
  - The truth is clearly in the middle

Lobbying Activity on Immigration

- Business
  - Agriculture, services, construction
- Unions
  - Once opposed, now in favor of immigration
- Immigration lawyers
- Ethnic groups
- Environmental-Zero Population growth groups
- Religious groups

Lobbying vs. Public Opinion

![Graph showing lobbying vs. public opinion](image)

Party line Voting on Reform Bills

![Graph showing party line voting](image)
Employee Sanctions - 1974

- Employee sanctions reduce the jobs that illegal immigrants can get, but ...
- Sanctions burden employers & threaten them with penalties
- Sanctions might cause discrimination
- Amendment to delete employer sanctions
  - Democrats 20% yes; Republicans 25% yes
  - Agricultural districts 90% yes; others 19% yes
  - Border state 62% yes; others 16% yes

Employee Sanctions - 1986

- Hall (D-TX) Amendment: Establish system for telephone verification of social security no.
  - Hall opposed employee sanctions & argued that there had to be verification to protect employers
  - Mazzoli argued cost was too high
  - Others said it was step toward national id card
- Vote:
  - Democrats 67% yes
  - Republicans 45% yes

Amnesty - 1986

- Shaw (R-FL) Amendment: Move continuous residence requirement from 1982 to 1980
  - Fewer immigrants would qualify
- Vote:
  - Democrats 12% yes; Republicans 77% yes
  - Border states 41% yes; others 29% yes
  - Agricultural districts 65% yes; others 27% yes
  - High % foreign-born 3% yes; others 40% yes