

New York Public Opinion Poll



Empire State Poll 2006

Report 5 Special Topic: Immigration Policy

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What is the issue?

New York has long been a haven to immigrants from all parts of the world, but current immigration policy debates may change the volume of new arrivals and the conditions under which they come. Undocumented immigration is clearly a concern for New Yorkers. A recent report by the PEW Hispanic Center estimated that some 650,000 undocumented immigrants live in New York, more than any other state except Florida, Texas and California. This report summarizes New York State residents' opinions about immigration policy options.

Methodology

- In total, 800 interviews; equally divided by upstate/downstate, then weighted to reflect actual distribution in the state.
- Random sample of New York State households – must be a resident of NYS and at least 18 years old to participate.
- Interviews completed conducted between February 2 and March 24, 2006.

See Report 1: Introduction & Methodology for full description

Survey Findings

A majority of New Yorkers support a range of measures to control undocumented immigration.

- The highest proportion of respondents support greater control of border crossing.
- A similar proportion of New Yorkers is also supportive of “a guest worker program that allows foreigners to work in the U.S. for a limited period of time (87 percent).

- Measures to make “it a criminal offense to enter the U.S. without valid immigration document” are supported by a smaller proportion (72 percent).
- However, a majority of New Yorkers, and about the same proportion (70 percent) support for “giving amnesty to persons already in the U.S. so that they can stay here and work.”

New Yorkers support various measures more strongly than others.

- Two-thirds said that they strongly support border controls while less than 40 percent strongly support a guest worker program.
- About half (52 percent) strongly support measures to criminalize undocumented immigration. In contrast, only about one-third strongly support an amnesty for immigrant workers.
- About one-half also said they strongly support “enforcing rules that make it illegal for employers to hire workers with valid immigration documents,” and “issuing a national identity card to all persons eligible to work in the U.S.”

There is broad based support for a guest worker program.

- Levels of support for this measure are similar regardless of political orientation and party affiliation, socio-economic status, religion, race, age and upstate/downstate residence.
- Support for the other measures varies depending one's political orientation, race or ethnicity, upstate/downstate residence and socio-economic status.



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Political affiliation has a clear association with the level of support.

- In general, a higher proportion of persons who identified most strongly with the Republican Party are supportive of more restrictive policy measures, compared with persons more strongly identified with the Democratic Party.
- About 70 percent of those who considered themselves strongly Republican strongly supported the criminalization of undocumented immigration, compared with only 40 percent of the respondents who labeled themselves as strongly Democrat.
- Support for amnesty for undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., considered a less restrictive option, was highest among strong Democrats with about 43 percent expressing strong support. In contrast, only 15 percent of strong Republicans expressed strong support for this measure.

Race or ethnicity is another factor influencing support for some of the immigration policy measures.

- The Empire State Poll shows that Hispanics are much less supportive than Whites of policy measures restricting undocumented immigration like stricter border controls, more enforcement of employer hiring laws, and the criminalization of undocumented immigration.
- African-Americans are somewhere in the middle. For example, about 30 percent of Hispanics strongly support criminalization compared with 58 percent of Whites and 46 percent of African-Americans. In contrast, more than half of Hispanics supported amnesty for undocumented immigrants compared with only 21 percent of Whites and 49 percent of African-Americans.

Not surprisingly given the concentration of racial and ethnic minorities downstate, upstate or downstate residence influences support for the same policies as race and ethnicity.

- Upstate residents are more supportive than their downstate counterparts of policies that restrict undocumented immigration.

Socio-economic status also influenced the level of support for some of the measures.

- The higher the income levels of New Yorkers the more likely they are to favor stronger border controls and more enforcement of employer sanctions.

Summary

Overall, very few New Yorkers favor increased levels of immigration. Only about 10 percent said that the number of immigrants coming into the U.S. should be increased. About the same proportion said that the number of immigrants should remain about the same as said that the number should decrease (45 percent). However, about 30 percent thought that number of immigrants should decrease *a lot*.

In considering these finding, it is important that New Yorkers do not consider themselves well-informed about the immigration policy options under discussion.

- Most New Yorkers did not consider themselves to be well informed about immigration policies. Only 10 percent claim to be very familiar with “recent immigration reform proposals made by President Bush or other politicians.”
- Taking into account the level of familiarity with immigration policy proposals does not change the proportion of individuals who express support for most of the proposals.

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