



Legal Immigrants: A Voice of Reason in the Immigration Debate

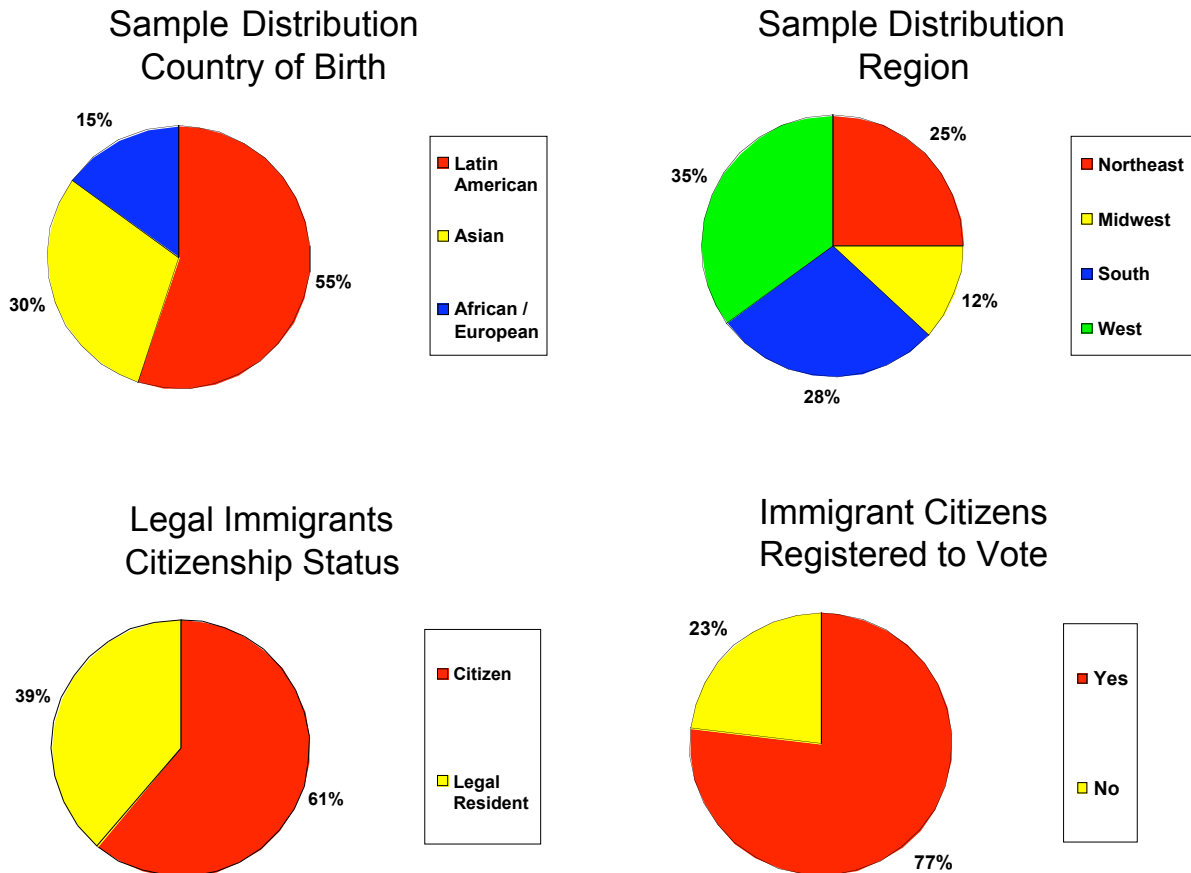
Conducted by Bendixen & Associates
For New America Media (NAM)
In partnership with
Center for American Progress
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund

Executive Summary
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Methodology

Bendixen & Associates interviewed 800 **legal immigrants** by telephone between February 24 and March 21, 2006. The sample was designed to be representative of the 26 million legal immigrants that reside in the United States according to the U.S. Census. Approximately three-fifths of the legal immigrants interviewed for the poll are citizens of the United States and about three-fourths of them (citizens) are registered voters.



Latin American respondents were interviewed in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole and reside in census tracts with a significant percentage of immigrants from this region of the world utilizing RDD. Latin American respondents to the poll are from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile.

Asian respondents were interviewed in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Tagalog and reside in census tracts with a significant percentage of immigrants from this region of the world utilizing RDD. Asian respondents to the poll are from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, India, Nepal, the Philippines, Japan, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, and Kazakhstan.

African and European respondents were interviewed in English and reside in census tracts with a significant percentage of immigrants from these regions of the world utilizing RDD. These respondents are from Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco, Egypt, Poland, Russia, and Germany.

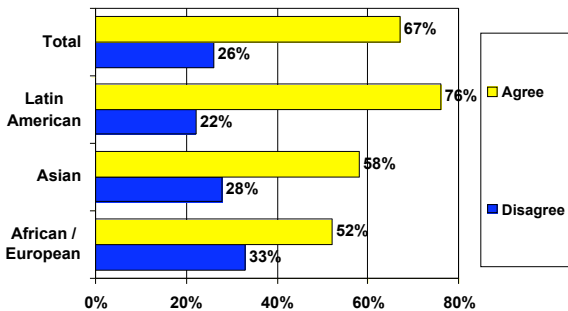
Respondents were asked a number of “screen” questions to ascertain that they were legal residents and/or citizens of the United States.

The margin of error for results from the poll is 3.4 percentage points.

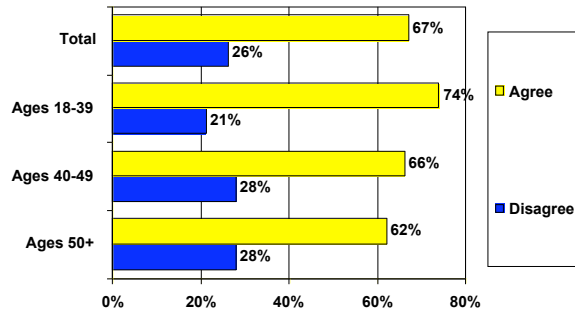
Major Findings

1. The **immigrant community** in the United States is **alarmed** regarding the tone and substance of the current political debate on immigration policy. Majorities of legal immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe feel that “the anti-immigrant sentiment is growing in the United States.” This opinion is most strongly felt by younger legal immigrants, those 18 to 39 years of age. A majority of legal immigrants – about 14 million Americans – report that this “anti-immigrant sentiment” has affected their families. Public opinion studies in California in 1993-94 revealed a similar situation. Second-generation ethnics and foreign-born citizens and legal residents were negatively impacted by the anti-immigrant messages communicated through the mass media by the supporters of Proposition 187. There were a number of California studies in the 90’s that indicated an increase in discrimination, racism and disrespectful treatment of ethnics in general and of Latinos in particular. Our poll also reveals that a majority of legal immigrants thinks that this “anti-immigrant sentiment” is being fueled by racism against immigrants from Latin America and Asia and that the debate about immigration policy has been “unfair and based on misinformation.”

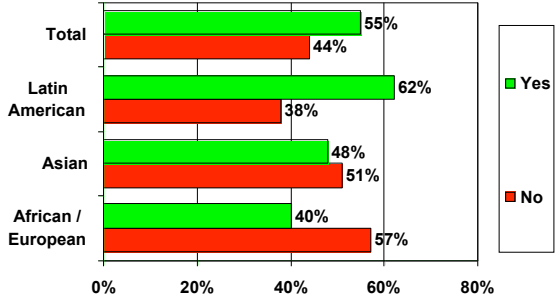
The anti-immigrant sentiment is growing in the United States.



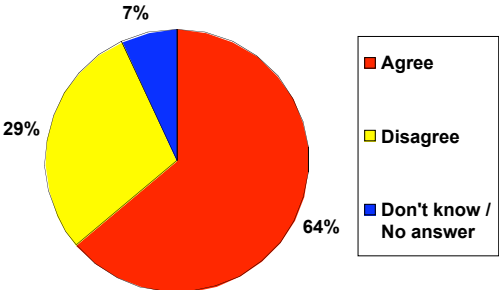
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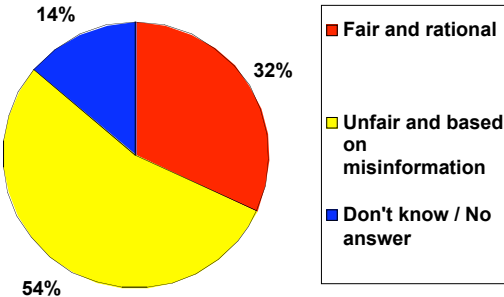
Has the anti-immigrant sentiment in the country affected you and your family?



The anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States is fueled by racism against immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

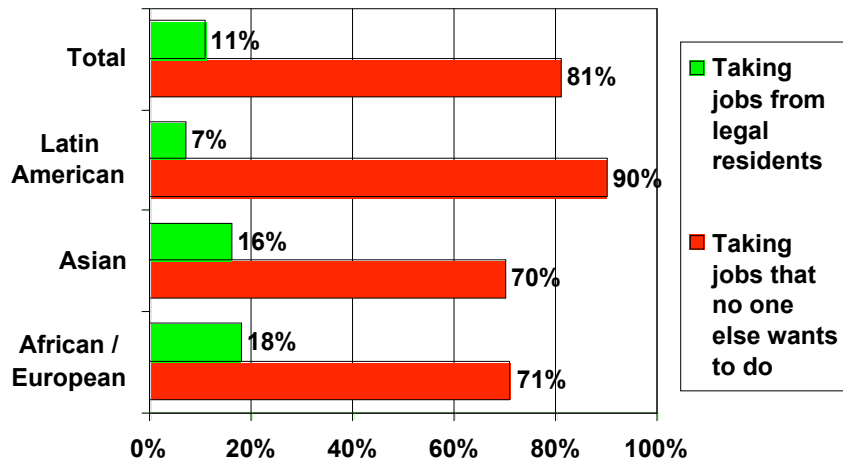


Would you say that the debate about immigration policy has been fair and rational or unfair and based on misinformation?

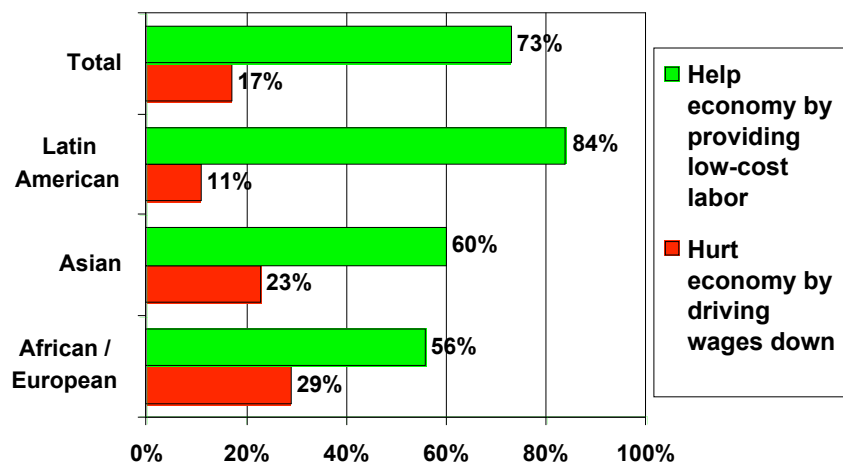


2. **Undocumented immigrants have a positive image** among legal immigrants from throughout the world. Although some political leaders argue that legal immigrants harbor animosity toward undocumented immigrants for cutting in front of them in line and for not respecting our laws, the poll results indicate little resentment toward undocumented immigrants. In fact, an overwhelming majority of legal immigrants think that the undocumented “take jobs that legal residents and citizens do not want to do.” These legal immigrants also feel that the undocumented have a positive impact on the quality of life of Americans and “help the economy by providing low-cost labor.”

Do you think that illegal immigrants are taking jobs from legal residents and citizens or taking jobs that legal residents and citizens do not want to do?



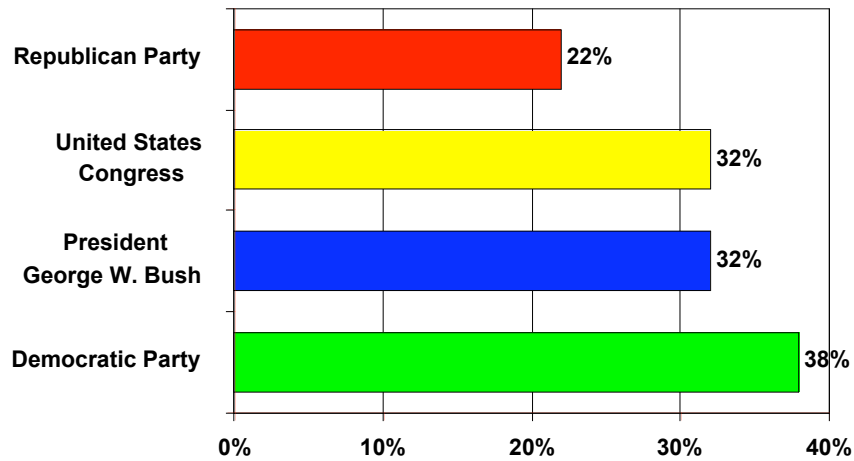
Some people say that illegal immigrants help the economy by providing low-cost labor. Others say they hurt the economy by driving wages down. Which is closer to your view?



3. The **major political “actors”** in the immigration debate in Washington, D.C. **receive fairly low ratings** from legal immigrants on the job they have done *so far* on the immigration issue. Only about one-fifth of those interviewed gave the Republican Party a positive rating on the way it has handled the debate on this issue. The U.S. Congress, President George W. Bush, and the Democratic Party do not fare much better, with only about one-third of legal immigrants giving them a positive rating. These poll results suggest that the “jury is out” among immigrant voters about the political “winners and losers” of this debate on immigration policy. The strategies utilized and the messages communicated by the President, the Congress and the two major political parties over the next few weeks – as the immigration debate reaches the full Senate and makes its way through the legislative process – will determine the final political effect of this policy debate.

Job Rating on Immigration Issues

“Good job” answers only



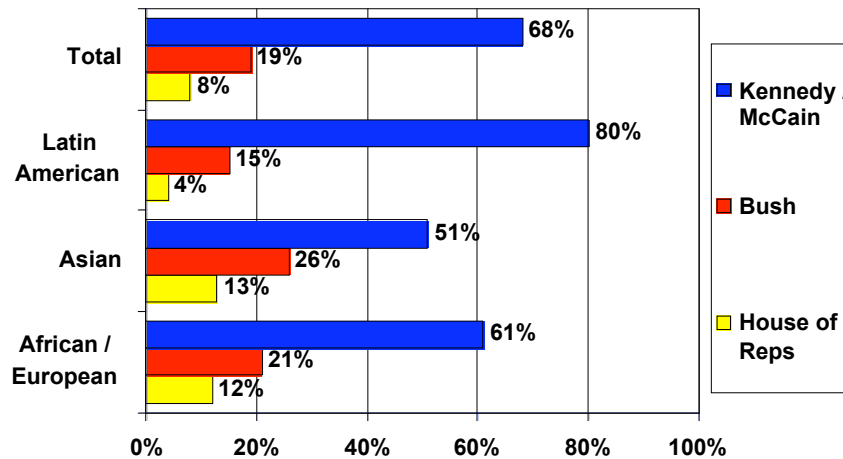
4. **The McCain/Kennedy immigration bill** has **majority support** among legal immigrants in the United States.

The questionnaire was administered in the following way: respondents were first read a number of immigration proposals that have been a part of the policy debate over the last few months and asked whether they favored or opposed each of them; they were then asked to pick the “best way to deal with illegal immigration” from a list of three proposals: the McCain/Kennedy proposal (... calls for temporary work permits for illegal immigrants and then after waiting six years, paying a fine and learning English, for them to be able to apply for green cards), the House of Representatives bill (... criminalizes illegal immigrants, calls for deporting them and for building a wall along the border with Mexico) and President Bush’s proposal (... calls for issuing temporary work visas for illegal immigrants followed by a mandatory return to their home country).

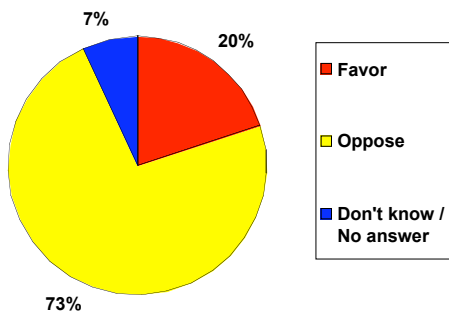
The McCain-Kennedy proposal was favored by more than three-quarters of legal immigrants from Latin America, three-fifths of those from Africa and Europe and by a majority of those from Asia. President Bush’s immigration proposal was acceptable to a majority of legal immigrants but was

chosen as “the best way to deal with illegal immigration” by only one-fifth of the respondents. **The immigration bill approved by the House of Representatives was favored by less than 10 percent** of legal immigrants. Legal immigrants from throughout the world strongly oppose “charging illegal immigrants with the felony of unlawful presence,” “arresting and deporting illegal immigrants” and “denying U.S. citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants born in the United States.” Latin Americans have strong negative feelings about “building a wall along major sections of the border between the United States and Mexico.”

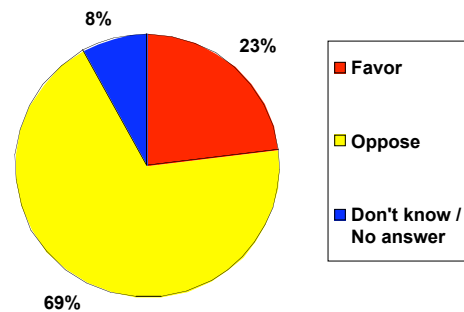
Immigration Proposals



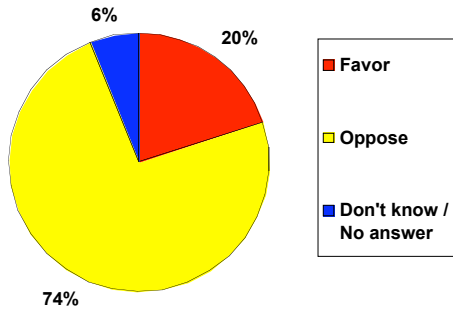
Arresting illegal immigrants in the United States and charging them with the felony of unlawful presence.



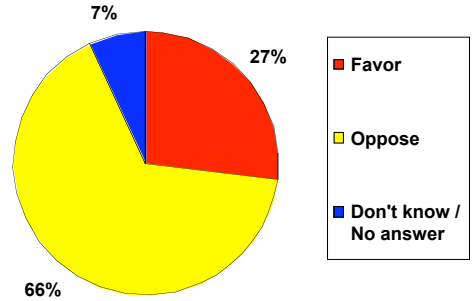
Deporting all illegal immigrants and sending them back to their country of origin.



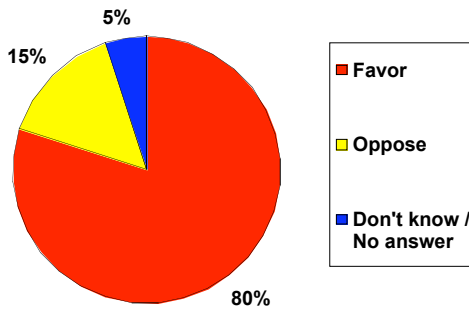
Denying U.S. citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants born in the United States.



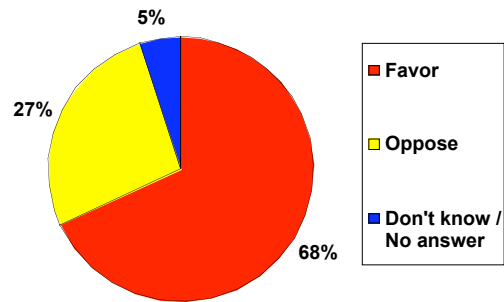
Building a wall along major sections of the border between the U.S. and Mexico to stop illegal immigrants from entering the U.S.



Granting illegal immigrants temporary work permits and allowing them to earn legal status after six years by paying a \$2,000 fine, learning English, and proving that they have no criminal record.



Issuing temporary work visas to illegal immigrants who qualify so that they can work in the United States for a few years. These illegal immigrants would then have to return to their home countries.



Imposing stiff penalties on employers who hire illegal immigrants and prosecuting religious and advocacy groups that help illegal immigrants.

