



***HISTORIC POLL OF  
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS  
FROM LATIN AMERICA***

***The Overwhelming Majority Of Undocumented Latin  
American Immigrants In The United States Would  
Comply With The New Immigration Laws***

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT**  
*Embargoed until Thursday, June 21, 2007*



## **METHODOLOGY**

The results and findings in this executive summary report are based on a national public opinion survey of 1,600 undocumented immigrants from Latin America that arrived in the United States before January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007. The sample was designed to be representative of the approximately 10 million undocumented immigrants from Latin America – 70 percent are from Mexico and the other 30 percent are from Central America, South America and the Dominican Republic. The telephone survey was conducted in Spanish between June 9<sup>th</sup> and June 19<sup>th</sup> of 2007 by professional interviewers. The margin of error for the full sample is approximately 2 percentage points. The study was designed and conducted by Bendixen & Associates, a public opinion research firm in Coral Gables, Florida. It was sponsored by New America Media. The poll was funded through the generous support of The Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, The James Irvine Foundation, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Open Society Institute, The San Francisco Foundation, The California Endowment and The California Wellness Foundation.

## **MAJOR FINDING**

Undocumented immigrants by an overwhelming majority are following the debate over immigration reform with close attention and would comply with proposed legislation to legalize their status, including paying stiff fines and fees and undergoing criminal background checks. Eighty-three percent say they would apply for the new “Z” work visa. Their greatest anxiety is over any requirement to return to their country of origin without a guaranteed right to return. The vast majority report that anti-immigrant sentiment has negatively impacted their families.

### **The “Z Visa”**

1. If new immigration legislation is approved by the Congress of the United States, the overwhelming majority of Latin American undocumented immigrants – 83 percent – would apply for the new “Z” visa that would allow them to live and work in the United States legally. The undocumented immigrants interviewed were given the following information about the new “Z” visa: “The proposed law would offer a new visa to undocumented immigrants living in the United States. To qualify for this new visa, undocumented immigrants would have to register at a government office and admit that they were in the United States illegally. The head of the family would have to pay \$3,000 in fines and fees and each undocumented member of the family would have to pay an additional \$2,000. Undocumented immigrants would also have to show that they have a work record in the United States and pass a criminal background check. Those who qualify could then live and work in the United States legally. They would be able to travel between the United States and their home country without problems. The new visa could be renewed every four years by paying \$1,500 in fines and fees.” A small percentage of the undocumented – 14 percent – said that they would not apply for the new visa. They felt that it would be easier to remain undocumented.

2. Substantial majorities of Latin American undocumented immigrants reported that they would be able to comply with all of the requirements of the new “Z” visa. Ninety-four percent were willing to be fingerprinted and to undergo a criminal background check; 89 percent felt that they would be able to show that they had a work record in the United States; 83 percent were willing to pay the \$3,000 in fines and fees for the head of the family and the additional \$2,000 for each undocumented member of the family; and 85 percent were willing to register at a government office and admit that they were in the United States illegally.
3. More than one quarter – 27 percent – of the undocumented immigrants from Latin America who would otherwise apply for the “Z” visa would not do so if they had to return to their home country to pick up their new work visa. Another 10 percent told our interviewers that they were not sure that they would still apply for a “Z” visa if one of the requirements was to return to their home country.

### **The “Green Card” and Citizenship**

4. The study indicates that approximately three-quarters of the undocumented immigrants who are willing to apply for the new “Z” work visa would also be “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in applying for a “green card” and eventually becoming a citizen of the United States. The undocumented immigrants interviewed were given the following information about the requirements necessary to apply for a “green card” and eventually to become a citizen of the United States: “The new law would require undocumented immigrants to wait 9 to 13 years to receive a “green card” and another 5 years to become citizens. They would have to pay a \$4,000 fine and pass an English proficiency test. Undocumented immigrants would also have to return to their home country to complete the application for a “green card” at the United States consulate.
5. The willingness of undocumented immigrants to return to their home country to complete the application for a “green card” depends on whether they are guaranteed re-entry into the United States. Eighty-five percent of the undocumented were willing to apply for their “green card” at the United States consulate in their home country “if they were guaranteed that they could return to the United States without a problem.” But only 35 percent were willing to travel back to their home country for that purpose if there were no such guarantee.
6. The other requirements for a “green card” and citizenship were less controversial. Ninety-two percent were prepared to pay the \$4,000 fine; 90 percent were willing to take an English proficiency test; and 71 percent were prepared to wait 9 to 13 years for their “green card” and another 5 years to become a citizen.

### **Quality of Life Issues**

7. A substantial majority of undocumented immigrants from Latin America – 78 percent – agree with the statement that “the anti-immigrant sentiment is growing in the United States” and 64 percent of them report that it is having a negative effect on their families.

And they are following the debate about immigration policy in the United States Congress with a great deal of interest. Eighty percent report that they are following it “very closely” or “somewhat closely.” Nevertheless, these immigrants have a very optimistic point of view about their quality of life in the United States. Eighty percent rate it as “excellent” or “good.” And even though the annual income of the majority is less than \$20,000, three-quarters of undocumented immigrants consider their economic situation to be positive.

8. Less than one-quarter - 23 percent - of the undocumented immigrants in the United States have health insurance. When someone in their family gets sick, one third of them told our interviewers that they visit a doctor's office or a community clinic, one sixth go to the emergency room at the nearest hospital while another sixth report that they try to take care of the problem at home without medical assistance. The other ten percent either return to their home country for treatment or find other ways of dealing with their health problems.