



**PUBLIC OPINION
STRATEGIES**

MEMORANDUM

TO: TAMAR JACOBY
IMMIGRATION WORKS USA

FROM: GLEN BOLGER/DAVE WILSON

RE: KEY FINDINGS – FOCUS GROUPS AND NATIONAL SURVEY

DATE: MAY 24, 2010

Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted four focus groups and a national telephone survey among likely voters. The focus groups were conducted on April 6, 2010 in Dallas, TX among soft Republicans of mixed gender, April 12, 2010 in Omaha, NE among a group of mixed gender swing voters and a group composed of base Republican males, and April 15 in Nashville, TN among base Republican females. The national survey was completed May 3-5, 2010 among 800 likely voters and has a margin of error of $\pm 3.46\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.

Key Findings

1. *A large majority of voters say America's current immigration system is in need of major reform.*

In the first set of focus groups, there was a consensus that America's immigration system is largely broken and in need of reform. When asked for a word or short phrase to describe America's immigration system, voters had very negative comments about the current state of affairs:

"Ineffectual." – Dallas Soft GOP Female

"Out of control." – Dallas Soft GOP Male

"Broken." – Dallas Soft GOP Male

"Unenforced." – Dallas Soft GOP Male

"The laws aren't in the right places." – Dallas Soft GOP Male

These feelings carried over to the national survey where nearly nine in ten voters (89%) said that America's current immigration system is in need of reform, while 69% said that major reform was needed. Just eight percent of voters said the current system works fine.

2. *Voters' opinions of legal and illegal immigrants are completely opposite.*

Nearly nine in ten voters (88%) are favorable to legal immigrants, with just eight percent unfavorable. Over six in ten voters (61%) are strongly favorable to legal immigrants. When asked about illegal immigrants, the data flips to 16% favorable/76% unfavorable, with over half (51%) strongly unfavorable.

This mirrors what we found in the focus groups, where legal immigrants were perceived to be more highly educated, and working in more white collar jobs:

“A lot of them in medicine and engineering and science come from other countries, particularly from the Asian continent. And they’re highly sought after, because we don’t really have, we’re not producing students in that caliber at this point in time, and a lot of companies seek those people.” – Omaha Swing Voter Female

“When I think of a legal immigrant, I think of someone who comes here maybe to go to school or do work in a more white-collar type job. And then they take those skills, and they leave the country and go back to their own country, you know. I don’t know that they take jobs away, but they take their skills.” – Omaha Swing Voter Female

Illegal immigrants were described with a bit more vitriol and said to take American jobs and take advantage of government provided social welfare programs without paying a fair share in taxes:

“So I did want to add, and you were saying that most of them come here to work, I believe that’s true. I think they also come though for the benefits of being in a, you know, that they can take advantage of being an immigrant, the food stamps and welfare. Once your child is born in this country, they become a citizen and can’t be deported.” – Dallas Soft GOP Female

“You hear on the news they pick fruit and all this, but you see them in every, I see them in construction, everywhere you go. If any construction, they’re working. You see them on the streets working in the potholes and things like that. Those are jobs, even with Metro, those are jobs that American people could be having. I’m not opposed to them working. I want them to work, but I want them to pay taxes too. But I just think that they are taking jobs from American people.” – Nashville Base GOP Female

3. *Voters strongly favor the bipartisan reform plan of Senators Charles Schumer and Lindsey Graham as written in their Washington Post op-ed.*

The bipartisan proposal was tested in two parts. First was the three pillars of reform – border security, work site enforcement, and a way for future workers to enter the country legally. Second was the fourth pillar – what to do with illegal immigrants already in the country. The language of the bill was tested as follows:

The bill has three parts:

- ✓ *Requiring biometric Social Security cards to ensure that illegal immigrants cannot get jobs,*
- ✓ *Strengthening border security and enforcement in the U.S. ...and...*
- ✓ *Creating a process to admit temporary workers.*

All U.S. citizens and legal immigrants who want jobs would have to obtain a high-tech, fraud proof Social Security card with biometric identifiers, such as a fingerprint, on the card. No government database would house that information – it will be a high tech version of the current Social Security card.

Prospective employers would be responsible for swiping the cards through a machine to confirm a person’s identity and immigration status. Employers who knowingly hire illegal workers would face stiff fines and prison sentences for repeat offenders.

There would be zero tolerance for gang members, smugglers, and those who commit felonies after coming here illegally. The Border Patrol’s staffing and funding would be increased.

The legislation would award green cards to immigrants who receive a PhD or master's degree in science, technology, engineering, or math from a U.S. university.

Lower-skilled immigrants would be allowed to come to the U.S. to work, participating in a program designed to give the kinds of workers who now come illegally a way to enter the country legally. This new worker-visa program would be flexible in size, allowing more workers to come when the economy is creating jobs and fewer during a recession. Some of these workers would stay in the U.S. for a while and then return home; some who succeeded on the job and contributed in their communities would eventually be given the opportunity to stay permanently.

Voters favored this proposal by a margin of 77% favor/21% oppose. Intensity in favor was also strong, with 39% of voters strongly in favor of the proposal. The proposal was found to have broad support across party lines (79% favor/19% oppose among Republicans, 75% favor/22% oppose among Independents, and 77% favor/22% oppose among Democrats).

4. *Voters realize that any immigration reform must also deal with the illegal immigrants already in the country.*

From the focus groups, we learned that voters want immigration reform to deal with the eleven million illegal immigrants currently in the United States. One voter, when asked for a piece of advice to give their state's U.S. Senators responded as follows:

And I think that it, if we pass a bill like this, that we would also, we have to find a way to include the illegal immigrants that are here now also. That would have to be part of the bill. – Omaha Swing Voter Female

In the survey, voters were then asked how to deal with the eleven million illegal immigrants currently in the country in two ways. The first version included language mentioning “legal status,” while the second version used “citizenship.” Each version was asked of a one-half sample:

This legislation would give illegal immigrants already in the country an opportunity to learn (legal status/citizenship). Under this part of the proposal, illegal immigrants would be required to pay fines and back taxes. They would also be required to pass background checks, be proficient in English and could not earn legal status before those who have already applied and are waiting for it.

Voters favored both versions by a margin of 83% favor/16% oppose – there was no difference between using “legal status” and “citizenship” in this proposed addition to the proposal.

The Bottom Line

Voters are ready for immigration reform in the United States. They believe that the current immigration system is broken and that something must be done to fix it. After hearing the Schumer-Graham proposal, voters strongly favor the proposal and continue to do so when asked whether or not illegal immigrants currently in the country should have an opportunity to earn legal status or citizenship after paying fines and back taxes.