ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF VOTERS HOLD STRONGLY ANTI-IMMIGRANT VIEWS

- According to a May 2009 poll by the Benenson Strategy Group, only a quarter of voters (26%) think Americans “would be better off if people in the U.S. illegally left the country.”

- According to Lake Research Partners and the Tarrance Group, 85% believe it would be impossible to “deport all 12 million illegal immigrants” in the U.S.

- According to an April 2009 New York Times/CBS News poll, only 24% think “the borders should be completely closed.”

- Over half of Lou Dobbs’ viewers disagree with his stance on immigration: 53% favor comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship or “amnesty.”

- Voters with strongly anti-immigrant views are disproportionately seniors. According to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, voters under 30 are half as likely as those over 65 to think “newcomers from other countries threaten traditional American customs and values” (30% to 65%).

EVEN IN THE RECESSION, VOTERS WANT IMMIGRATION REFORM

- Though not voters’ first priority, immigration is among the issues Americans want Congress to tackle as soon as it has taken care of the economy.

- Consistent majorities of voters continue to consider immigration an “important” or “very important” issue.
  - According to a May 2009 Benenson Strategy Group poll, 55% think immigration should be a “high priority” for Congress.
  - According to an August 2009 Rasmussen Reports survey, 66% consider immigration legislation “very important.”

- According to the Benenson Strategy Group, 57% of Americans think the recession makes it more urgent for Congress to address immigration, compared to 39% who say this is not the right time.

- The share of voters who think unauthorized immigrants should “become legal taxpayers” has risen since the start of the downturn from 62% to 71%.

- According to a May 2009 hypothetical comparison, members of Congress who propose to “address immigration reform and deal with the economy” have a 25% advantage over members who think the economic crisis means the country should put off immigration reform.
VOTERS SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AND WANT A LEGAL, ORDERLY IMMIGRATION PROCESS

- Large, consistent majorities support greater control at the border.
  - According to the Pew Research Center, 73% agree that “we should control people coming to live in our country more than we do now.”\(^{12}\)
  - According to the Benenson Strategy Group, 75% think that “the federal government is not doing enough to secure the nation’s borders.”\(^{13}\)

- According to an August 2009 Rasmussen Report, three quarters of voters want the police to verify people’s immigration status at traffic stops.\(^{14}\)

- According to the same survey, more than two-thirds (68%) think employers who knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants should be punished.\(^{15}\)

- Yet consistent majorities believe that trying to control immigration with enforcement alone is less likely to be successful than a comprehensive approach.
  - According to the Benenson Strategy Group, two-thirds (67%) of voters prefer comprehensive reform to an approach that “secures the border, stops taxpayer benefits and forces those who entered illegally to leave” (31%).\(^{16}\)

- According to Rasmussen, if the border is controlled and immigration takes place “within the law,” 55% of Americans believe the U.S. should “welcome everyone except criminals, national security threats and welfare dependents.”\(^{17}\)

CONSISTENT MAJORITIES SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM THAT COMBINES BETTER ENFORCEMENT WITH A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

- More than 60% of voters continue to favor immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship.
  - According to an April 2009 ABC News/Washington Post poll, 61% support allowing illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. “if they pay a fine and meet other requirements.”\(^{18}\)
  - According to a May 2009 Pew Research Center survey, 63% favor “a way for illegal immigrants in the United States to gain legal citizenship if they meet certain conditions, including passing background checks and paying fines.”\(^{19}\)
  - Among Democrats and independents, support for comprehensive reform has risen since 2007 – 11 points among Democrats and 3 points among independents. GOP support has declined somewhat, but half of Republicans remain favorable.\(^{20}\)
  - In swing districts, according to a May 2009 Benenson survey, 61% support comprehensive reform.\(^{21}\)

- The better voters understand comprehensive reform, the more supportive they become.
  - When the Benenson Strategy Group asked voters about comprehensive reform without explaining what it entailed, 64% were supportive.\(^{22}\)
  - When Benenson described exactly what a comprehensive reform package would include, detailing the enforcement provisions and requirements for becoming a citizen, 86% percent were favorable.\(^{23}\)
VOTERS HAVE MIXED FEELINGS, BUT DON’T BLAME IMMIGRANTS

- No more than 15 to 20 percent of voters hold strongly pro- or anti-immigrant views. Most – the remaining 60 percent – have mixed, ambivalent feelings.

- Many are concerned about the number of foreigners arriving but still believe the U.S. should remain a nation of immigrants.
  - In the recession, those who want to reduce the number arriving have grown from 39% to 50%, according to a July 2009 Gallup poll.\(^{24}\)
  - Still, even during the downturn, 58% of voters say immigration is “good for the country,” according to Gallup.\(^{25}\)

- The public holds mixed views about whether immigrants help or hurt the U.S. economy.
  - Four different national media polls (New York Times/CBS News, ABC News/Washington Post, Time Magazine and Associated Press/Ipsos) asked the same question and got the same answer in 2006. One in three voters (29% to 35%) think immigrants take jobs from Americans. But nearly twice as many (53% to 68%) think immigrants do jobs Americans don’t want to do.\(^{26}\)
  - According to a September 2009 survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, 30% of Californians “consider immigrants a burden because they use public services.” But nearly twice as many (58%) think newcomers “benefit the state” because of “their hard work and job skills.”\(^{27}\)
  - According to Bendixen & Associates, 41% of Florida, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada voters think immigrants in low-paying jobs “hurt” the economy by driving down wages. But an equal number (43%) think newcomers “help” the economy by providing low-cost labor.\(^{28}\)
  - According to the Benenson Strategy Group, the public’s primary concern about unlawful immigrants is that they “don’t pay taxes and use services”: nearly half (49%) of voters believe that. In contrast, only 17% think unlawful immigrants take jobs from Americans.\(^{29}\)
  - According to a September 2008 Transatlantic Trends report, 61% of voters believe immigrants start new businesses and create jobs for Americans.\(^{30}\)

- Many voters are angry about the way the country handles immigration, but they don’t necessarily want to take their anger out on immigrants.
  - According to a June 2008 Rasmussen poll, a third of Americans (32%) are angry about the immigration issue. But of those voters, 83% blame the government, while only 12% blame the immigrant looking for a job.\(^{31}\)
  - Nearly half of voters in Florida, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada (47%) blame the federal government for what’s wrong with the immigration system, while 20% blame employers who hire unlawful workers and 3% blame the immigrants.\(^{32}\)
  - According to Benenson, voters distinguish clearly between “law-abiding employers” and their “bad-actor competitors who underpay workers without papers.” And for voters in swing districts, “creating a level playing field for honest employers and workers” is among the most compelling reasons to enact immigration reform.\(^{33}\)