



## **GOP Voters Back Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

A recent survey<sup>1</sup> from [Benenson Strategy Group](#) shows strong support for comprehensive immigration reform across the spectrum, including Republican voters. This is a clear case where the conventional wisdom about the politics of immigration is dead wrong. Read on for a snapshot of where Republican voters are on the issue, by the numbers.

### **WHILE IMMIGRATION IS NOT THE TOP ISSUE FOR REPUBLICAN VOTERS, THEY BELIEVE IT IS SERIOUS AND IMPORTANT**

- When asked to choose the two or three most pressing issues that Congress should focus on, 61% of Republican voters cite the economy and 23% cite health care. Only 9% cite immigration as one of the top two or three issues, but this is still higher than abortion, energy, or crime.
- When asked whether illegal immigration is a serious problem, 92% of Republicans said yes and only 8% said no. Seventy percent said “solving the issue of illegal immigration” should be a high priority for Congress, while 29% said it should be a medium or low priority.

### **REPUBLICAN VOTERS SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM AND REJECT AN ENFORCEMENT-ONLY APPROACH**

- When asked whether they support Congress passing “comprehensive immigration reform,” without hearing details about what the plan includes, 63% of Republicans said yes and 22% said no.
- When given the details behind reform, and asked whether they support Congress passing a law that would: “Secure the border, crack down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, and require illegal immigrants to register for legal immigration status, pay back taxes, and learn English in order to be eligible for U.S. citizenship,” 89% of Republicans said yes and 11% said no.

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<sup>1</sup> May 9-12, 2009 survey of 1000 likely 2010 voters nationwide (30% were Republican voters). The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 3.10\%$  overall and  $\pm 5.07\%$  for Republicans.

- When given three choices for how to deal with the 12 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally, 62% of Republicans said “They should be required to register, meet certain conditions, and eventually be allowed to apply for citizenship.” Eight percent of Republicans said “They should be legally allowed to stay on a temporary basis but not allowed to become U.S. citizens,” and 28% said “They must leave the country.”
- The survey also tested support for an enforcement-only approach, and found that 62% of Republican voters prefer a comprehensive approach the enforcement-only alternative (36%). This is especially notable given the fact that the enforcement-only option included a promise to deny taxpayer funded benefits to illegal immigrants, which was these voters’ top issue of concern.<sup>2</sup>

## **REPUBLICAN VOTERS THINK COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM WILL HELP THE ECONOMY**

- Ninety-five percent of Republican voters think the state of the U.S. economy is “fair” (30%) or “poor” (65%), and 61% chose the economy as one of the top issues the President and Congress should focus on.
- When asked their biggest concern about illegal immigration, 53% of Republican voters said illegal immigrants “use taxpayer services and don’t pay taxes,” while 23% said they “broke the law by entering the country illegally.” Only 14% said they “take jobs away from Americans and depress wages.”
- When asked whether “We would be better off if people who are in the United States illegally became legal taxpayers so they pay their fair share,” or “We would be better off if people who are in the United States illegally left the country because they are taking away jobs that Americans need,” 65% of Republican voters agreed with the former statement while 30% chose the latter.
- When given arguments for and against tackling comprehensive immigration reform in light of the economic downturn, 63% of Republicans said we should enact immigration reform and 32% said we should focus on other priorities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Question worded as follows: “Which statement is closer to your view: 1) We need a comprehensive approach that secures the border, cracks down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, and requires all illegal immigrants to register with the government and meet requirements to become legal, including working, paying taxes, and learning English. Or 2) We need to secure our border, stop giving taxpayer funded benefits to illegal immigrants, and make sure that those who broke our laws by entering this country illegally are forced to leave.”

<sup>3</sup> Question worded as follows: “Which statement is closer to your view: 1) The economic crisis we are currently in makes it more crucial than ever that we solve our immigration problems. We must pass a comprehensive approach that secures the border, cracks down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants, and requires all illegal immigrants to register with the government, undergo background checks, and pay back taxes to earn legal immigration status. They would have to meet additional conditions in order to become citizens including learning English and continuing to work and pay taxes. If we do this, we will ensure that all Americans get higher wages and move 12 million illegal immigrants out of the shadows and onto the tax rolls. Or 2) With the economic situation in this country so bad right now, this just isn't the time to worry about fixing immigration. The world economy is in turmoil, and the President and Congress need to focus on getting things back on track before more Americans lose their jobs or their homes.”

## REPUBLICAN VOTERS WANT ACTION NOW, NOT LATER

- When asked whether Congress should take up immigration reform this year, 65% of Republicans said yes, “Congress can handle multiple issues at the same time. They should tackle immigration reform this year.” Only 34% of Republicans said no, “With the economy and healthcare already on Congress’ plate this year, they should wait and tackle immigration reform later.”
- When asked at the beginning of the survey whether they supported Congress “tackling immigration reform this year and not waiting to later,” 76% of Republicans said yes and 23% said no. After hearing a series of arguments for and against reform, support increased and opposition decreased, with 84% of Republicans saying it should move this year and 15% saying no.

## REPUBLICAN AND INDEPENDENT VOTERS WANT POLICYMAKERS TO OFFER SOLUTIONS, NOT SOUNDBITES

- When asked whose approach to immigration reform most closely reflects their view, 75% of Republican voters chose the Republicans in Congress while 6% chose the Democrats. An additional 19% chose “neither” or “don’t know.” This is unsurprising, given the political alignment of this subgroup. However, their strong support for a comprehensive solution—one that many Republican leaders in Congress rejected in the past—makes it clear that Republican candidates who embrace practical immigration reform will be in line with the majority of GOP voters.
- In addition, analysis of [Independent voters’ opinions about immigration reform](#) shows that they also support comprehensive reform at very high percentages. While thirty-five percent of Independent voters say that the Democratic Party most closely reflects their views on the issue, 27% of prefer the Republicans and 34% had no preference. Again, Republicans who embrace common sense immigration reform will find common ground with a strong majority of Independents as well as GOP partisans.
- As other [polling in Congressional battleground districts](#) around the 2008 election shows, politicians who articulate support for comprehensive immigration reform win over voters. According to pollsters Pete Brodnitz, Celinda Lake, and David Mermin results from polling in swing Congressional Districts show that: “Support for comprehensive immigration reform not only enhances the public’s view of a candidate on the issue of immigration, but it also increases voter support for that candidate along a variety of other dimensions, including voters’ confidence in the candidate’s approach to improving the economy.”
- In addition, when asked how we should deal with the 12 million immigrants in our country illegally in November 2008, [fully 67% of respondents in swing districts](#) chose comprehensive immigration reform over requiring them to leave the country (14%) or granting access to temporary immigration status (13%).