



Not Just a “Latino Issue”: Independent Voters Also Want Action on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

A recent survey¹ from [Benenson Strategy Group](#) shows strong support for comprehensive immigration reform across the spectrum, including Independent 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 Independent voters are on the issue, by the numbers.

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

- When asked to choose the two or three most pressing issues that Congress should focus on, 66% of Independent voters cite the economy and 31% cite health care. Only 7% cite immigration as one of the top two or three issues, but this is still higher than taxes, energy, and crime.
- When asked whether illegal immigration is a serious problem, 84% of Independents said yes and only 16% said no. Fifty-seven percent said “solving the issue of illegal immigration” should be a high priority for Congress, while 44% said it should be a medium or low priority.

INDEPENDENT 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, 62% of Independents said yes and 21% 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,

¹ May 9-12, 2009 survey of 1000 likely 2010 voters nationwide (35% were Independent voters). The margin of error for this survey is $\pm 3.10\%$ overall and $\pm 5.08\%$ for Independents.

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,” 84% said yes and 15% said no.

- When given three choices for how to deal with the 12 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally, 66% of Independents said “They should be required to register, meet certain conditions, and eventually be allowed to apply for citizenship.” Eleven percent of Independents said “They should be legally allowed to stay on a temporary basis but not allowed to become U.S. citizens,” and 22% said “They must leave the country.”
- The survey also tested support for an enforcement-only approach, and found that 66% of Independent voters prefer a comprehensive approach to the enforcement-only alternative (33%). 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.²

INDEPENDENT VOTERS THINK COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM WILL HELP THE ECONOMY

- Ninety-six percent of Independent voters think the state of the U.S. economy is “fair” (31%) or “poor” (65%), and 66% chose the economy as one of the top issues the President and Congress should focus on.
- When asked their biggest concern about illegal immigration, 51% of Independent voters said illegal immigrants “use taxpayer services and don’t pay taxes,” while 22% said they “broke the law by entering the country illegally.” Only 15% 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,” 68% of Independents agreed with the former statement while 29% chose the latter.
- When given arguments for and against tackling comprehensive immigration reform in light of the economic downturn, 59% of Independents said we should enact immigration reform and 35% said we should focus on other priorities.³

² 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.”

³ 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.”

INDEPENDENT VOTERS WANT ACTION NOW, NOT LATER

- When asked whether Congress should take up immigration reform this year, 63% of Independents said yes, “Congress can handle multiple issues at the same time. They should tackle immigration reform this year.” Only 35% of Independents 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,” 73% said yes and 25% said no. After hearing a series of arguments for and against reform, support increased and opposition decreased, with 79% of Independents saying it should move this year and 20% saying no.

INDEPENDENT VOTERS WANT POLICYMAKERS TO OFFER SOLUTIONS, NOT SOUNDBITES

- When asked whose approach to immigration reform most closely reflects their view, 35% of Independent voters chose the Democrats in Congress while 27% chose the Republicans. Fully 34% chose “neither” or “don’t know,” showing that many voters simply do not know the Parties’ positions on the issue, or do not see a difference between the promises made in Washington.
- As 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%).