



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

January 2010 Update

A December 2009 survey<sup>1</sup> from [Benenson Strategy Group](#) shows strong support for comprehensive immigration reform across the political spectrum, including among Republican voters. The results are consistent with a [similar poll](#) conducted in May 2009. 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, 63% of Republican voters cited the economy and 54% cited health care. Only 6% cited immigration as one of the top two or three issues, but this was still higher than abortion, energy, or crime.
- When asked whether illegal immigration is a serious problem, 93% of Republicans said yes and only 7% said no. Seventy-one 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,” 62% of Republicans said yes and 26% said no.
- When given details about the elements of comprehensive immigration reform, 88% of Republicans said they support requiring illegal immigrants to register with the government and meet certain conditions in order to be eligible for U.S. citizenship. Seventy-eight percent supported provisions to enhance security on the U.S.-Mexico border and 75% approved of a crackdown on employers who hire illegal immigrants.

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<sup>1</sup> December 19-21, 2009 survey of 800 likely 2010 voters nationwide. The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 3.46\%$  overall, and  $\pm 6.58\%$  for the Republican subgroup.

- When given three choices for how to deal with the 12 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally, 59% of Republicans said “they should be required to register, meet certain conditions, and eventually be allowed to apply for citizenship.” Thirteen percent of Republicans said “they should be legally allowed to stay on a temporary basis but not allowed to become U.S. citizens,” and 27% said “they must leave the country.”

## **REPUBLICAN VOTERS THINK COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM WILL HELP THE ECONOMY AND WANT ACTION NOW**

- Ninety-eight percent of Republican voters said the state of the U.S. economy is “fair” (28%) or “poor” (70%), and 63% chose the economy as one of the top issues the President and Congress should focus on.
- When asked their biggest concern about illegal immigration, 52% 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 “left the country because they are taking away jobs that Americans need,” 61% of Republican voters agreed with the former statement while 34% chose the latter.
- When given arguments for and against tackling comprehensive immigration reform in light of the economic downturn, 64% of Republicans said we should enact immigration reform and 32% said we should focus on other priorities.<sup>2</sup>
- When asked again about priorities for Congress, 61% of Republicans said “Congress can handle multiple issues at the same time. They should tackle immigration reform this year.” Only 37% of Republicans said “With the economy and healthcare already on Congress’ plate this year, they should wait and tackle immigration reform later.”

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

- When asked whose approach to immigration reform most closely reflects their view, 72% of Republican voters chose the Republicans in Congress while 5% chose the Democrats. An additional 21% chose “neither” or “don’t know.” This is unsurprising, given the political

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<sup>2</sup> Question worded as follows: “Now I’d like to read you a pair of statements. Of the two, please tell me which statement is closer to your own views. A: 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. B: 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.”

alignment of this subgroup. However, their strong support for a comprehensive solution—one that many Republicans in Congress rejected in the past—makes it clear that candidates who embrace comprehensive reform are 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.
- [Polling in Congressional battleground districts](#) confirms that comprehensive immigration reform has strong support even in swing districts. Polling in three conservative Congressional Districts (ID-1, AL-2, and CA-3) from June 2009 is entirely consistent with the results of the May and December 2009 national surveys.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

- **December 2009 National Survey (Benenson Strategy Group)**  
[http://amvoice.3cdn.net/56a19baae3cb88385d\\_tsm6va6cl.pdf](http://amvoice.3cdn.net/56a19baae3cb88385d_tsm6va6cl.pdf)
- **June 2009 Congressional District Surveys (Benenson Strategy Group)**  
[http://americasvoiceonline.org/page/-/americasvoice/reports/ID%20AL%20CA%20District%20Polling\\_0609.ppt](http://americasvoiceonline.org/page/-/americasvoice/reports/ID%20AL%20CA%20District%20Polling_0609.ppt)
- **May 2009 National Survey (Benenson Strategy Group)**  
[http://amvoice.3cdn.net/ea94778f39d6c895c3\\_zvm6beppq.pdf](http://amvoice.3cdn.net/ea94778f39d6c895c3_zvm6beppq.pdf)
- **May 2009 Fact Sheet on Independent Voters (Benenson Strategy Group)**  
[http://amvoice.3cdn.net/623a9b4511f5c37635\\_9qm6ib7to.pdf](http://amvoice.3cdn.net/623a9b4511f5c37635_9qm6ib7to.pdf)
- **May 2009 Fact Sheet on Republican Voters (Benenson Strategy Group)**  
[http://amvoice.3cdn.net/5fb898f5561fd55a1c\\_xzm6bhqtv.pdf](http://amvoice.3cdn.net/5fb898f5561fd55a1c_xzm6bhqtv.pdf)
- **Round-Up of Immigration Polling (Various Sources)**  
[http://amvoice.3cdn.net/aed609a4968f2d0380\\_h6m6bn79o.pdf](http://amvoice.3cdn.net/aed609a4968f2d0380_h6m6bn79o.pdf)