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To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: THE IMMIGRATION MOMENT

The Democrats have a commanding lead in the key races for the Congress and the U.S. Senate, increasingly as a result of problems facing Republicans in their own base. That two-thirds of the country thinks we are headed in the wrong direction would not be possible unless a lot of Republican voters share in the national discontent. In an earlier memo, we showed how Republicans were running about 10 points behind 2004 congressional performance among virtually all its loyalist groups. The discontent has moved now to a new level.

- Among self-identified Republicans, 40 percent say the country is headed in the wrong direction and 24 percent want to go in a significantly different direction than Bush.
- In red counties, those carried by Bush in 2004, 64 percent say the country is headed in the wrong direction and Republican have only a 48 to 43 point lead in the races for Congress.
- In white rural areas, 61 percent say wrong direction; and amazingly, Democrats and Republicans are running even in the races for both the House and Senate.

So, if you want to know why the House Republicans have become demagogic and acted to pass a punitive immigration bill, then you need look no further than the Republican base. The Republicans are attempting to consolidate and energize their voters in a near lethal environment. But as we shall see, immigration is complicated. For fear of losing his standing with his Hispanic voters and perhaps even business support, the president has moved to back comprehensive reform—but that is not what his electoral base is looking for. If

anything, this unresolved debate is likely worsening problems for the Republicans.

The Republican fracturing on the issue is actually an opportunity for Democrats to offer a firm and comprehensive set of ideas that will get confidence in their approach to the country's problems. While there may be a different emphasis in different parts of the country, Democrats will do well if they are, in some combination, insisting on realistic solutions to this big problem. This means addressing acculturation and English requirements for citizenship, enforcement and a respect for the law, and paths to citizenship for the law-abiding. They also will do well attacking the Bush administration for failing to enforce the law at the borders and with employers.

The New Immigration Moment

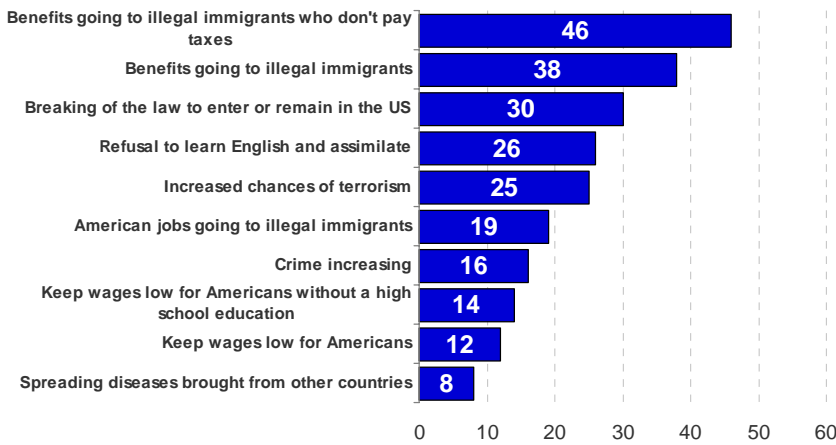
The sight of demonstrations, boycotts and a deadlocked Congress has moved the immigration issue into the spotlight. In general, the public is not very warm to the idea of immigration and even less so to undocumented immigrants, yet the responses are somewhat more positive than in the past. The country says the demonstrations make them less sympathetic, yet the country is becoming somewhat less polarized.

There seems to be some increased understanding of the role of immigrants, as a majority says we should keep immigration at current levels. Later, we shall discover that the least popular policy proposal is deporting the illegal immigrants. The country is evenly split on the question of whether immigrants take American jobs or not.

What gets to people is, first, the idea that immigrants are using public services and taking benefits, without paying taxes; second, the idea that illegal immigration is creating disrespect for the law; and third, that the immigrants are not acculturating and learning English. On all of these issues, the intensity is on the side of those critical of immigration.

Use of benefits and law breaking are biggest concerns.
Assimilation important for over a quarter

Thinking about illegal immigration, which TWO of the following are your biggest concerns about illegal immigration?

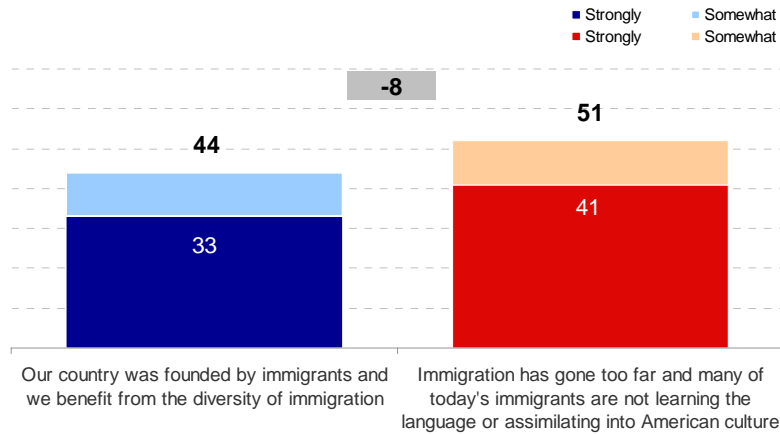


The hostility to immigration rises most sharply with age, so that pre-retirement and senior voters are the most upset on all these questions.

Nonetheless, there is a significant minority of around 44 percent who think immigration is a positive thing, even against the argument that immigration has gone too far and that today's immigrants are not learning the language or assimilating the culture. A minority of 40 percent acknowledge the values of faith and hard work of the new immigrants, even when faced with the argument of lawlessness in crossing the border.

Benefit of diversity vs. no assimilation

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.



Policy Ideas and the Marginalization of the House

The cluster of punitive policies advanced in the House are the policies least favored by the country.

- Only 43 percent favor building a fence along the Mexican border to address the problem.
- A slim majority of 51 percent favor deportation of illegal immigrants. That fairly radical idea has slim majority support, but that is because 62 percent of Republicans support it. No wonder the House Republicans have gone down this road.
- 56 percent support deportation, while allowing immigrants to apply to return to the US as guest workers.

But all of that falls well short of the policy ideas that seek to grapple with the problem. Barely a third of the country strongly favors any of these ideas.

The strongest proposals emphasize acculturation and enforcement.

- Almost everyone favors required English and learning of American culture and government before becoming citizens, including 73 percent who support it strongly.
- Almost 80 percent want greatly increased enforcement, particularly penalties against employers who hire illegal immigrants; 60 percent strongly favor this idea.
- Three quarters support a guest work program and an ability to apply for citizenship, if they pay fines and back taxes; it is strongly supported by 40 percent.

The three principles for the public are acculturation, enforcement and a path to citizenship for the law-abiding.

Democratic Themes

There is no reason for Democrats to act like they are on the defensive on the immigration issue. At the outset of this survey, the Democrats enjoyed an 8-point advantage on the issue, though almost half of respondents say “don’t know” or “neither” party. After advancing our themes and joining a debate, the Democratic advantage rises to 11 points, with the non-response dropping below 40 percent. Democrats have a point of view that allows them to make gains.

Themes that score well here condemn unrealistic proposals that would deport 12 million people, but place a strong emphasis on respect for law and enforcement, deporting law breakers and giving the great majority who are law-abiding an opportunity to emerge from the shadows to achieve citizenship. After hearing the top theme, three-quarters say they are more likely to vote for the Democrat, 40 percent much more likely.

It is important to note that the next two strong Democratic themes emphasize enforcement only. They are not quite as strong overall, but nearly as many voters say they are “much more likely” to support the Democrat after hearing these. These themes include strong attacks on the Bush administration for failing to enforce the laws at the borders and failing to enforce employment laws with employers. The theme puts the Bush administration and the Republicans on the defensive and underscores the respect for law that underlies the overall Democratic approach in this survey.

Democratic immigration themes

■ Top Tier

Now let me read you some statements from a Democratic candidate for Congress. After each statement please tell me whether it would make you more likely or less likely to support this Democratic candidate.

	Much more likely	Total more likely
Sending all 12 million illegal immigrants back to their countries is unrealistic and will result in millions of people hiding in the shadows. We should deport those immigrants with criminal records immediately, no questions asked. But most immigrants are law abiding, hard working people and we should provide them with a path to citizenship while holding them responsible to pay taxes and share in the responsibilities of our society	40	74
Illegal immigrants break the law to enter our country. The Bush administration is failing in its responsibility to enforce immigration laws. It is simply too easy to get into the U.S., and we need to enforce immigration laws before we do anything else	38	68
Illegal immigration and the lack of border security puts our country at risk and we need to take action now to secure our borders. The Bush administration is failing in its responsibility to control our borders and potential terrorists can now cross our border at will. It is simply too easy to get into the U.S. and we need to secure our borders before we do anything else	37	67

While we have not displayed the full range of potential Democratic themes here, the ones that stress the importance of immigration to our economy and society score the lowest. Virtually across the entire political spectrum, people think there is a problem to be brought under control—and voters are open to Democratic themes that show we have practical solutions, centered on law, enforcement, acculturation and a path to citizenship.

When we place this approach against the approach of the House Republicans, we win the issue by 58 to 34 percent, by 24 points. We also win the battle for intensity, underscoring our ability to frame the issue effectively, combining respect for law with giving people a path to citizenship.

Immigration: Democratic vs. Republican House approach

Which statement do you agree with more, the statement from the Democratic candidate or the statement from the Republican candidate?

	Agree strongly	Total agree
The Democrat says we need a tough immigration reform that gets this problem under control. We need to greatly strengthen border security and to penalize companies that employ illegal immigrants. We need for law abiding immigrants to come out of the shadows and a low wage economy and get on a path to citizenship. To get this under control, we need greater respect for law	45	58
OR		
The Republican says we need reforms the make border security and law enforcement a priority. We need to build a fence along the US-Mexico border, increase our border patrols, enforce strict penalties for companies that hire illegal immigrants, and declare illegal immigrants and those who help them to be felons	22	34

Strategic Note

The House Republicans elevated this issue, trying to consolidate their base with a punitive approach to immigration. With the Republicans divided, the issue likely exacerbates rather than solves their base problem. On the one hand, Democrats can attack the Bush administration for failing to enforce the law and losing control of the problem. But they can also advance their own comprehensive ideas, reflecting mainstream thinking against mass deportations and for a path to citizenship for the law-abiding.

That combination reflects our values and increases confidence in Democrats to address our nation’s problems.