

THE COMPLEXITY OF IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES IN THE UNITED STATES: PUBLIC OPINION, LATINOS, AND THE BORDER STATES OF ARIZONA AND CALIFORNIA

*Frederic I. Solop**
*Nancy A. Wonders***

Immigration has long been a dominant thread in the fabric of United States history. Indeed, virtually every U.S. history book characterizes the country as “nation of immigrants.” Despite this national identity, over the last decade, the U.S. and international press have devoted a great deal of attention to anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-immigration policies within the United States. News coverage suggests that the general public has become increasingly hostile to immigration and that unfavorable attitudes toward immigrants are widely and uniformly held. We believe that the current media spin on immigration is linked to important social realities, including the quickening pace of globalization, the increased securitization of the U.S.-Mexico border, the tragic jump in the number of border deaths, global economic crisis, and the development of anti-immigrant policies and practices in many states and local jurisdictions. At the same time, it is our view that media coverage of immigration issues is a poor gauge of the actual attitudes of the U.S. public. In this article, we aim to more accurately characterize these attitudes by reviewing what public opinion polls in the United States say about immigrants and immigration policies.

We argue that U.S. public opinion, including what appears to be “anti-migrant” sentiment, is, in fact, more complex than commonly reported by the media. To reveal this complexity, we explore U.S. public reaction to a variety of immigration issues, public policy proposals, and border strategies. We use recent polling data to evidence that public opinion in the United States is not homogeneous. In particular, Latino public opinion on immigration issues is markedly different from that of the general population. Further, public opinion about this topic in border states deviates significantly from the mainstream of opinion in the United States. We demonstrate this by comparing national attitudes with attitudes in Arizona and California, two border states with a substantial body of polling on this topic, providing ample data with which to demonstrate and analyze the complexity of U.S. public opinion on immigration.

In a democracy, public opinion research is a way to give “voice” to ordinary people. Public opinion reflects the values, attitudes, and beliefs of specific popula-

* Professor, Department of Politics and International Affairs, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona. fred.solop@nau.edu.

** Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona, nancy.wonders@nau.edu, <http://home.nau.edu/sbs/crimj/faculty.asp>.

tions, such as residents of a nation, citizens, voters, or people who self-define as being of a particular racial or ethnic group. Public opinion is also a dynamic component of the policy process. Significantly, public opinion can lead to critical social change; opinions sometimes crystallize around a particular political agenda, people mobilize for change, and important policy changes are enacted. As research has demonstrated, public opinion has played a critical role in the development of key social movements for change throughout U.S. history (Piven 2006; Tarrow 1998). We believe that an analysis of public opinion provides critical insight into public attitudes, including those that pose barriers to constructive policy change, as well as those that may create valuable opportunities for future policy reform.

Public Attitudes

In order to discern public attitudes about immigration, we draw here on previous literature reviewing U.S. public opinion in the 1990s and 2000s (Lapinski et al. 1997; Buck et al. 2003; Pantoja 2006; Segovia and Defever 2010). When looking across years of data, it is striking to see that general attitudes toward immigration have actually been relatively stable over time in the United States. Perhaps surprisingly, it has never ranked highly when respondents are asked in an open-ended format to identify the most important issues facing the nation today. Yet, when directly asked to comment on the magnitude of the immigration “problem” in the United States, three-quarters of respondents say immigration is either a “very big problem” or a “moderately big problem” (Pew September 2002, March 2006). Yet, on the whole, most people in the United States think immigration is a “good thing” for the nation (Gallup Polls June 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006) and enhances U.S. society (Hamilton College/Zogby International February 2003).

Previous public opinion research has revealed that attitudes toward immigration tend to be more negative as the number of immigrants coming into the U.S. increases and when economic conditions become unfavorable (Lapinski et al. 1997). Research has also shown that attitudes toward specific immigrant groups vary, with European immigrants viewed more favorably than those from Asia and Latin America (Lapinski et al. 1997; Buck et al. 2003). Despite the fact that U.S. residents think immigrants contribute more than detract from the nation’s well-being, majorities of the U.S. public wish to decrease the flow of illegal immigrants into the country (Lapinski et al. 1997; Buck et al. 2003) and deny legal and illegal immigrants access to a variety of public services (Pantoja 2006). Residents want to see U.S. immigration policy totally overhauled; yet, there is little confidence in the ability of elected officials to implement federal policy on the issue (Segovia and Defever 2010).

When survey questions about immigration become more specific and provide contextual information, positive public attitudes are dampened. Referencing the “growing number of newcomers,” polls find that the country is divided as to whether recent immigrants do or do not pose a threat to traditional American values (Pew

August 2002, August 2003, January 2007). When the survey question is framed in terms of “immigrants today,” 52 percent of people say that immigrants are a “burden on our country” rather than strengthen the country (Pew December 2005, March 2006). Opinion on this topic was more divided from 2003 through the end of 2005, with less than half of polling respondents saying immigrants are a “burden on our country.” Pew surveys in 2006 and 2010 suggested that opinion is currently looking more like it did in the 1990s when 63 percent of polling respondents thought of immigrants as a burden on the nation (Pew March 2006, June 2010).

Although many believe that immigrants place a burden on U.S. society, at the same time, there is widespread recognition that immigrants play an important role in its economy. From the early 1990s through today, a majority of survey respondents in the United States agree that immigrants fill jobs that U.S. citizens do not want, rather than take jobs away from U.S. residents (CBS/*New York Times* June 1993, December 1995; CBS/*New York Times* January 1994, July 2005, October 2005; Pew March 2006).

Beyond the general questions about immigration and immigrants outlined above, some polls have focused on particular issues, policies, and/or groups of migrants. To further reveal the complex and contingent character of attitudes about immigration, we explore polls that have addressed governmental regulation of immigration, the distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, various policy options, and pathways to citizenship.

GOVERNMENTAL REGULATION OF IMMIGRATION

Public opinion polls indicate that U.S. residents look to the federal government for solutions to immigration issues. Consistently, three-quarters of the population agrees that the nation should “restrict and control” the flow of immigrants into the country “more than we do now” (Pew June 1992, July 1994, November 1997, September 1999, August 2002, August 2003, January 2007). How can immigrant flows be better controlled? People would like to see the numbers of immigrants coming into the U.S. decreased, rather than increased (CBS/*New York Times* May 2007). At times, a majority of survey respondents have called for reductions in the flow of immigrants into the United States. This was especially evident immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Today, the percentage of people favoring decreases in immigration hovers in the mid-30- to mid-40-percent range. The percentage of people who would like to see immigration increased hovers in the mid-teens.

It is clear that the tragedy of September 11, 2001, had an effect on immigration attitudes in the U.S. The perpetrators of the attacks were foreign nationals who came into the U.S. across seemingly porous borders. People today believe that stricter immigration controls might have prevented their arrival on U.S. soil. When the issue of immigration is contextualized with reference to September 11, survey respondents take a firm stand against immigration. A February 2003 Hamilton College/Zogby International survey told voters that the U.S. has severely restricted

the flow of “refugees” into the nation since September 11. When asked if the U.S. should go back to pre-September 11 levels, 70 percent said, “No.”

To reiterate, whenever the conversation turns toward how best to control immigration into the United States, people expect the federal government to take the lead in this policy area. The U.S. public supports increased government spending and increased government control in this field. At the same time, residents lack confidence in the ability of their elected officials to effectively implement immigration policy.

LEGAL VS. ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants can be in the U.S. legally or illegally. United States residents distinguish between the two groups and have different attitudes toward them. While attitudes toward legal immigrants are moderately supportive, attitudes toward *illegal* immigrants are consistently negative.

Heightened concern about illegal immigrants is not new. A *New York Times/CBS News* poll asked people in the mid-1980s if most recent immigrants are here legally or illegally. Virtually half of the respondents (49 percent) said they thought recent immigrants were here illegally (June 1986). One-third (32 percent) thought most immigrants were here legally and 19 percent were not sure. Following 9/11, the percentage thinking most recent immigrants were here illegally moved up to the mid-fiftieth percentile (NPR/Kaiser/Harvard University October 2004). In 2006, attitudes looked much like they did in 1986, suggesting that the word “immigration” continued to evoke illegal rather than legal immigration (Pew March 2006). Illegal immigration was thought to be a “very serious problem” by a strong majority of registered voters in the mid-2000s (Quinnipiac Poll February 2006). Roughly another 30 percent said illegal immigration is a “somewhat serious” problem. In another survey, 67 percent say illegal immigration is an “extremely important” or “very important” issue (CNN/Opinion Research Corporation September 2006).

In the mid- to late 2000s, polls found that the U.S. public believes that illegal immigrants are filling unwanted, low-paying jobs in the U.S., rather than taking jobs away from legal residents (CBS/*New York Times* May 2007). Regardless of the types of jobs illegal immigrants are thought to hold, illegal immigration has a negative connotation. Illegal immigrants are believed to hurt the economy by driving down wages and draining available funding for social services (CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup December 2005; NPR/Kaiser/Harvard October 2004; CNN Poll June 8-11, 2006). In contrast, legal immigrants are considered to be helping the U.S. economy or to have no impact on the economy at all. Not surprisingly, the strength of the economy affects public attitudes toward immigration and employment, and attitudes toward illegal immigration are more negative during times of economic crisis (Lapinski et al. 1997).

Whereas the U.S. public is concerned about the economic impact of illegal immigration, it tends not to link illegal immigration and crime together. Most people

think legal and illegal immigrants commit crime at the same rate as “native-born Americans” (NPR/Kaiser/Harvard October 2004). Research supports the view that crime is no more common among illegal immigrants, and some research has found crime rates to be lower among migrants than among U.S. citizens (Valenzuela and Martinez 2006).

POLICY OPTIONS

Polls in the mid-1990s explored policy options for handling illegal immigration, including creating paths to citizenship, the merits of guest worker status, or deportation of illegal immigrants. The policy debate expanded in the mid-2000s and included discussion of many variants of citizenship and guest worker status. Newer options include sending the National Guard to the border, building an impenetrable fence on the border, denying a variety of social services to illegal immigrants, and empowering citizen groups to patrol the borders. The expanded policy debate has emerged from the failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform. New voices have come to the table today and more policy alternatives are being identified.

The federal government is a major focus in the immigration debate. Three out of five people think the federal government is “not tough enough” on immigration, and a majority say the government should spend more money “prevent[ing] illegal immigrants from coming to this country” (NPR/Kaiser/Harvard October 2004). There is majority support among voters in the United States for militarizing the borders with federal agents and the National Guard (56 percent-78 percent), for imposing fines on employers who hire illegal immigrants (60 percent), and for deporting immigrants who are not in the country lawfully (55 to 57 percent) (*Fox News/Opinion Dynamic Polls* May 2005, April 2006, May 2006; *Pew* March 2006; *CNN* June 2006). However, the country is divided over building a wall to stop illegal immigration (45 percent in favor, 50 percent oppose), eliminating all forms of public assistance to illegal immigrants and their children (43 percent in favor, 45 percent oppose), and sending employers who hire illegal immigrants to jail (40 percent in favor, 55 percent oppose) (*Pew* January 2007; *CNN* September 2006).

There is tremendous support in the U.S. for centralizing and strengthening the powers of government to more effectively enforce citizenship laws. Three-quarters of the population support a national identity card that would prove whether someone is a legal citizen or not (*Pew* March 2006). Two-thirds support a government database defining who is and is not legally eligible to work in the United States and requiring employers to consult it before hiring new employees (*Pew* March 2006).

Given the lack of comprehensive immigration reform, increased pressure has been brought to bear in many states to have local police officers and, significantly, U.S. citizens, play a larger role in monitoring and reporting immigration violations (Wonders 2006, 2008). Public opinion data indicate that the U.S. public tends to support greater involvement of local police and ordinary citizens in immi-

gration enforcement efforts. Eighty-three percent of the U.S. public wants the police to check citizenship status when someone is arrested; nine out of ten people want social service agency workers to check the citizenship status of new applicants; a similar proportion of respondents say employers should be required to check the citizenship status of new employees (CNN Poll June 2006). Hospital workers are the only group spared from the expectation that agencies and citizens ought to routinely enforce immigration law; the country is divided over whether hospitals should check citizenship status before tending to an injured person (CNN Poll June 2006).

The public is very concerned that illegal immigrants are taking unfair advantage of social service benefits provided by the government. Two-thirds say illegal immigrants should not be eligible for state or local government benefits (Pew March 2006). The public does hold a special place for allowing the children of illegal immigrants to attend public school. Seventy-one percent say they should be allowed, while 26 percent say they should not (Pew March 2006).

If the federal government is not going to do the job, should citizen groups be allowed to enforce the border, especially citizens armed with weapons? Attitudes toward the “Minutemen,” a group composed of citizen volunteers who patrol the U.S. border with Mexico, divides the public. One-third or more of the U.S. public support the work of the Minutemen, while another third considers them to be little more than vigilantes (Pew March 2006; *CBS News Poll* October 2005; *Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll* April 2005, May 2006). Two-thirds of the country prefers having government rather than a voluntary group of citizens play the role of border enforcer.

CITIZENSHIP VS. AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

Over the last decade, a variety of proposals have called for new pathways to citizenship as a policy response to illegal immigration in the United States. Many undocumented immigrants have been living in the United States for a long time. They are raising families here, working regular jobs, and paying taxes. How should the nation respond to long-term illegal immigrants, as distinguished from recent border crossers? Policy proposals run the gamut from deporting all illegal immigrants back to their country of birth to creating a path forward for these immigrants to achieve legal citizenship. What does the public think about these proposals? The answer is framed by the wording of the question itself.

If asking for a thumbs-up or thumbs-down on deporting all illegal immigrants, the country says “thumbs-up.” Two-thirds of the nation approves of the U.S. government deporting illegal immigrants back to their native country (CNN Poll June 2006). Opinion mellows slightly when deportation is played against granting “some kind of legal status” to illegal immigrants already living in the U.S. Under this scenario, 40 percent of respondents think illegal immigrants should be allowed to stay in the country (Pew March 2006). Significantly, two-thirds of registered voters support a

middle path whereby illegal immigrants would be allowed to stay in the U.S. with “temporary worker” status and then required to return to their home countries (Ayers, McHenry & Associates June 2006; Quinnipiac University Poll November 2006).

It appears that the public does not support making it easier for undocumented workers to become citizens (Gallup June 2005). However, opinion shifts 180 degrees when the policy question is qualified to narrowly focus on immigrants who have been in the U.S. for more than five years, are working, and would be required to pay back taxes. Seventy-seven percent of residents support such a policy (CNN April 2006). The distinction between older undocumented workers living in the U.S. and newer border crossers makes a significant difference in U.S. reaction to proposed solutions. Upwards of 59 percent of survey respondents say workers who have been in the U.S. for several years should be allowed to earn legal working status and not be deported (Pew April 2006, January 2007).

Finally, a significant proportion of the public prefers creating a path to citizenship for undocumented migrants, rather than creating a temporary worker program or deporting them back to their home countries (NPR/Kaiser/Harvard October 2004; *USA Today*/Gallup April 2006).

The Complexity of Public Opinion: Latinos and Border States

Thus far, we have focused on general U.S. public opinion about immigration. In reviewing this data, it is evident that it is highly contextual and dependent upon question wording. Still, we have outlined broad trends suggesting that the public is more supportive of immigration than might be expected from media accounts; at the same time, the general public consistently expresses concern about certain aspects of immigration, particularly illegal immigration, and seeks greater governmental involvement in this policy area.

In the following section, we seek to further reveal the complexity of U.S. public opinion through more focused attention on key groups and locales central to the immigration debate. First, we will explore Latino attitudes, followed by the examination of two key border states, Arizona and California.

LATINO ATTITUDES

The Pew Hispanic Center conducted a National Survey of Latinos in 2006 just before the November election. The results are interesting and bear mentioning here. First, it is quite evident from the polling data that attitudes of Latinos living in the U.S. (both native and foreign-born) are different from attitudes among the population as a whole. Whereas the general public favors increasing border control by deploying more federal agents and the National Guard, Latinos oppose these

measures (Pew July 2006). While the U.S. public is divided over proposals to build a bigger, stronger fence at the border, Latinos oppose this fence by a two-to-one margin (Pew July 2006). Ninety-three percent of Latinos prefer the U.S. developing a route to citizenship for illegal immigrants already living in this country, though the population divides over the question of allowing all illegal immigrants a chance to become citizens or only those who have been here a minimum of five years (Pew July 2006).

Arizona legislators recently signed SB1070 into law, requiring all law enforcement personnel to check the immigration status of anyone suspected of being in the country illegally. Although currently placed on hold by the federal courts, the issue has become a lightning rod for divergent attitudes. According to a 2010 Pew Hispanic Center survey of Latinos in the U.S., 64 percent of U.S. residents support SB1070. On the other hand, 79 percent of Latinos oppose Arizona's immigration law (Lopez, Morin, and Taylor 2010).

Significantly, the 2006 Pew study also shows there is growing concern within the Latino community that ongoing debate over immigration is furthering discriminatory attitudes in this country. About a third of Latinos in the 2010 survey report that they or a family member have experienced discrimination within the past five years due to their ethnicity.

At the same time, one result of recent immigration debates is a new solidarity being forged within the historically divided U.S. Latino community (Pew July 2006). Latinos believe their community will mobilize around discrimination issues and express their voice in the voting booth and in the streets with renewed social movement activity (Pew July 2006). This is a significant finding given the growing presence of Latinos in the United States and the potential of a proportionately large constituency like the Latino community for wielding power in the electoral system. As the immigration debate continues to unify Latino identity and mobilize Latino power, the character of politics in the United States will inevitably change.

TRENDS IN BORDER STATES

The complexity of U.S. public opinion about immigration is thrown into high relief when we look specifically at attitudes in border states. Detailed investigation of public opinion in border states demonstrates that attitudes and politics there are not necessarily in tune with national U.S. attitudes, and they are certainly not homogenous. To illustrate, we explore public opinion toward immigration in two border states: Arizona and California. Table 1 provides a quick glimpse of key demographic features of both, as compared to the U.S. as a whole.

As Table 1 indicates, there are significant differences in the proportion of the Latino population in California (36 percent), and Arizona (30 percent), in contrast with the United States as a whole (15 percent). Despite the similar percentage of Latinos in each state, the sheer number of Latinos in California is six times larger than in Arizona, a fact that we believe is important for understanding the differing atti-

TABLE 1
KEY DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF CALIFORNIA AND ARIZONA

	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>California</i>	<i>Arizona</i>
Population (million) ¹	307	36.9	6.6
Percent Hispanic/Latino ²	15	36	30
Numbers and percent of Undocumented Immigrants (million) ³	11.2 (3.6%)	2.55 (6.9%)	400 000 (6.1%)

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2009).

² *American Community Survey* (2005-2009).

³ Passel and Cohn (February 2011).

tudes within each state. Pew Hispanic Center estimates that California heads the list of “Estimates of the Unauthorized Migrant Population for States” with approximately 2.55 million illegal immigrants in 2011, or 6.9 percent of the population (Passel and Cohn 2011). Many of California’s “unauthorized immigrants” are from a variety of nations, not just Spanish-speaking ones. Unauthorized immigrants constitute 6.1 percent of the Arizona population with 400 000 illegal immigrants in 2011 (Passel and Cohn 2011).

One noteworthy difference between California and Arizona is that growth in the population of “unauthorized immigrants” in the latter from 2000 to 2005 was more dramatic than in the former. California saw a 15-percent increase in the “unauthorized immigrant” population from 2000 to 2005 (Passel and Cohn 2010); in contrast, Arizona witnessed a 50-percent increase during this period. As we have evidenced, illegal immigration seems to be one of the largest sources of anxiety about immigration within the U.S. In the 1990s, California experienced a rapid rise in illegal immigration and correspondingly strong anti-immigrant sentiment, as shown by public opinion data and the Proposition 187 debate (Daniels 2004). It appears that recent anti-immigrant sentiment in Arizona is similarly linked to a large new increase in undocumented migration to the state.

In the section below, we provide more detailed analysis of how attitudes in these two border states differ from the nation, and from one another. Our analysis demonstrates that differences in public opinion about immigration in Arizona and California may be due, in part, to the timing of illegal migration. We also emphasize the increased diversity of the population in these border states, especially the relatively large and growing percentage of Latinos. The California example, in particular, suggests that as the Latino community expands in size, Latino attitudes take on increased weight in statewide surveys, leading toward a moderation of opinion on immigration issues.

ARIZONA

Arizona shares the longest border with Mexico, some 322 miles. Over the last decade, federal policy has made it more difficult for people to cross from Mexico into the U.S. at historic crossing points in California and Texas (Daniels 2004; Nevins 2010). This policy has had the effect of making Arizona the most active crossing point for irregular entry (McDowell and Wonders 2010), a fact that has likely had a significant effect on state-wide attitudes and does a great deal to explain the recent divergence of Arizona attitudes from those of the nation.

In a national survey that included a five-city oversample, Pew Hispanic Center found that Phoenix residents express greater concern about immigration issues than tends to be true elsewhere. This is noteworthy because Phoenix is the state's population center and, therefore, dominates statewide politics. People were asked in an open-ended format to say the most important issue facing their local community. Nationally, 3 percent listed "immigration." In Phoenix, 18 percent said "immigration" is the most important issue (Pew March 2006). Nationally, 41 percent of the public defines immigration as either a "very big problem" or a "moderately big problem," according to the Pew study. In Phoenix, 78 percent of the public says immigration is a very big or moderately big problem (Pew March 2006). In fact, a majority of Phoenicians (55 percent) says immigration is a "very big problem." In the national study, one-third of the U.S. public said they approve of the job the Minutemen are doing (Pew March 2006), while in Phoenix, one-half of city residents approve, suggesting greater frustration in the nation's fifth largest city at how the federal government is handling immigration.

Northern Arizona University's Social Research Laboratory, one of Arizona's major public opinion polling groups, did a series of public opinion polls on immigration issues in the state. According to their results, border and immigration issues have steadily moved to the forefront of statewide concern in Arizona. In spring 2003, just 6 percent of Arizona adults said "immigration" was the most important issue in the state (NAU Social Research Laboratory). By February 2007, 52 percent of Arizonans said "immigration/border issues" were the most important topic in the state.

By more than a 2:1 margin, Arizonans think that immigration of people from abroad to the United States in recent years has been "bad" (53 percent) rather than "good" for the country (24 percent) (NAU Social Research Laboratory Spring 2005). This contrasts dramatically with national opinion as expressed in a recent Gallup Poll in which two-thirds of people say immigration has been a good thing for the country vs. 28 percent who say it is a bad thing.

A majority of Arizonans (57 percent) would rather see the federal government spend more money on limiting the flow of immigrants into the U.S. than on integrating new immigrants into U.S. culture and society (NAU Social Research Laboratory Spring 2005).

When asked about strategies for addressing illegal immigration, Arizonans prefer law enforcement options that penalize undocumented immigrants rather than

options designed to help undocumented immigrants. Eighty-four percent want more money to be put into border enforcement, 70 percent want enforcement of laws that prohibit hiring of undocumented immigrants, and 61 percent would direct funds to deporting undocumented immigrants back to their home countries (NAU Social Research Laboratory Spring 2005).

In contrast to the national data, there is less support in Arizona for programs to facilitate immigrant access to services. Fifty-one percent of Arizonans support spending more money on legal services for immigrants wishing to apply for legal residency status. Spending on English language instruction for undocumented immigrants is supported by 46 percent. One-third of Arizonans (38 percent) support expenditures for programs to place undocumented immigrants in jobs where workers are needed, and 19 percent support funding social services for undocumented workers.

Arizonans want to see something —practically anything— done to address immigration and border issues. Sixty percent of Arizonans polled expressed support for former Arizona Congressman J.D. Hayworth's proposal to increase penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants (NAU Social Research Laboratory Fall 2005). He also wanted to require all U.S. citizens to obtain a Social Security identification card with a photograph. Fifty-nine percent support Arizona Senator Kyl's proposal to require illegal immigrants living in the U.S. to leave the country and allow them to return legally to work temporarily if there are no U.S. workers available to fill a job. Fifty-eight percent support Arizona Senator John McCain's earlier proposal to allow illegal immigrants to pay a fine and apply for a temporary work visa. They could apply for permanent residence and eventually citizenship after a number of years.

Half of Arizonans (50 percent) expressed support for a proposal that would have allowed some illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. to legally stay for several years as long as they hold jobs that no U.S. citizen wants. Forty-eight percent indicated support for a proposal to use military technology to help the U.S. Border Patrol look into Mexico to locate and track the movements of potentially illegal immigrants before they cross the border.

More recently, Arizona's SB1070 has captured international attention. SB1070 compels state officials and agencies to enforce immigration law and also criminalizes those who employ or assist undocumented migrants. According to the May 5, 2010, Rocky Mountain Poll, 52 percent of Arizonans and 56 percent of registered Arizona voters support the Arizona legislation. Significantly, sixty-nine percent of Arizona Latinos, on the other hand, oppose SB1070.

CALIFORNIA

California is another state that shares a border with Mexico. As noted previously, one major difference between California and Arizona is that California's experience of undocumented migration, while significant, has been less dramatic than Arizona's during the last decade. Additionally, given that the most significant period

of Latino migration occurred in previous decades, the Latino population now constitutes a long-standing and vital part of the state's social and political life. It is likely that these important differences between the two states shape critical differences in public opinion.

One of the most consistent and available sources of public opinion data in California is the Field Poll. The Field Poll has conducted surveys on immigration across several years. Whereas Arizonans have a more negative perspective on the contributions of all immigrants to the United States, Californians hold a more moderate viewpoint, especially when it comes to evaluating the effect of illegal immigrants on the state overall.

Californians are very concerned about the issue of illegal immigration, though the level of that concern has subsided over time. In February 2006, three-quarters of the California population said they were either "extremely concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about immigration (Field Poll February 2006). This level of concern is quite similar to that seen in Phoenix where 55 percent say immigration is a "very big problem" and 23 percent say it is a "moderately big problem" (Pew March 2006). While high, this is somewhat lower than levels of concern in the mid-1990s when 90 percent of Californians were concerned about this issue (Field Poll October 1993).

Attitudes toward the impact illegal immigration has had on the state of California have also improved over time. In 2006, the population was divided, with 47 percent saying undocumented immigrants have a favorable effect and 45 percent saying they have an unfavorable effect on the state (Field Poll February 2006). In the early 1980s, 78 percent said illegal immigrants had an unfavorable effect on the state (Field Poll January 1982) and in the mid-1990s 68 percent of Californians held this view (Field Poll April 1994).

According to Field Poll findings, attitudes on this question bear a significant relationship to the race of the respondent. In 2006, just 33 percent of white non-Hispanics in California said illegal immigrants have had a favorable effect on the state, while 75 percent of Latinos say they have had a favorable effect (Field Poll March 2006). Forty-three percent of respondents whose race is defined as "other" (Asian, Native American, etc.) say illegal immigrants have had a favorable impact on the state.

Similarly, in 2006, 70 percent of Californians said illegal immigrants are doing jobs others do not want rather than taking jobs away from other Californians (Field Poll March 2006). In contrast, in 1994, 58 percent said illegal immigrants were doing jobs others do not want (Field Poll April 1994). In the 2006 survey, Latinos once again expressed a different viewpoint from that of white non-Hispanics (Field Poll March 2006). Eighty-five percent of Latinos said illegal immigrants are doing jobs others do not want, compared to 65 percent of white non-Hispanics.

It appears that as the proportion of Latinos and people of color residing in California grows, the proportion of people saying illegal immigrants have had a favorable impact on the state has increased. According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, Latinos were 26 percent of California's population in 1990 (1990) and 36 percent

of the population in 2009 (2009). This steady, large increase in the proportion of the population that is Latino, combined with increased Latino unity surrounding the immigration debate, has begun to crystallize into more favorable public opinion toward immigrants and immigration issues.

In 2005, almost two-thirds of Californians said that the number of illegal immigrants entering California from Mexico had increased over the past several years (Field Poll August 2005). In response, Californians expressed very strong preferences for particular policy responses. Unlike what we see in polling elsewhere, the number-one option favored by Californians (83 percent) is to create a program whereby illegal immigrants living in the U.S. for a number of years can apply for citizenship if they have a job, learned English, and pay back taxes (Field Poll April 2007). Unlike in Arizona, programs that enable undocumented workers to become citizens or at least acquire legal status are consistently favored over programs that rely on law enforcement to keep illegal workers out of the country or charging illegal immigrants with the felony of unlawful presence (Field Poll April 2006).

Increasing the number of border agents is supported by 71 percent of people, and temporary worker programs that move illegal immigrants toward being legal are supported by 67 percent of Californians. Similar to the rest of the nation, building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico and requiring all illegal immigrants to leave the country are not favored policy responses in California. A bare majority disapproves of allowing undocumented workers to obtain a California driver's license (Field Poll February 2006, March 2005, September 2003), and people are generally opposed to Minutemen activities (Field Poll August 2005, September 2003).

More recently, according to Field Poll results, Californians are divided over the merits of Arizona's SB1070 legislation. Just under half of California residents (49 percent) say they approve of the law, while 45 percent oppose it (Field Poll July 2010). Within California, white non-Hispanic voters support the law by 58 percent. Latino voters oppose the Arizona law 71 percent to 24 percent.

Complex and Changing Attitudes

This article has synthesized a large number of public opinion polls on immigration to create a complex portrait of U.S. attitudes about this important topic. Despite the media frenzy about immigration, attitudes toward immigration among the U.S. public have been relatively stable over time. Perhaps surprisingly, the U.S. public does not place immigration at the top of their list of concerns for the country. The public generally has positive feelings toward immigration, particularly past immigration, and recognizes the contributions immigrants make to the economy and culture of the United States. In this regard, we remain a nation of –and for– immigrants.

At the same time, people today are concerned that much immigration is *illegal* immigration. The public wants the federal government to play a larger role in moving forward immigration reform and, since the September 11 tragedy, has expressed heightened concern that the nation's borders should be secured. Survey

respondents consistently say they want the federal government to take more leadership in this area and to spend more tax dollars to secure the nation's borders and identify and prosecute people who violate immigration statutes.

Analysis of Latino attitudes and public opinion in border states further reveals the complexity of U.S. attitudes toward immigration. Latinos are now the largest minority population in the United States, and, significantly, the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projects that by 2050, Latinos will constitute 30 percent of the U.S. population, a proportion consistent with their current percentage in Arizona and California. As we have documented, surveys consistently reveal that Latinos view the immigration issue differently than other population groups in the United States. For example, Latinos are more concerned than other groups that immigration debates fuel discriminatory attitudes in the country, and at least some research has found these concerns to be warranted (McDowell and Wonders 2010). At the same time, the immigration debate is bringing greater unity to Latinos, a population group that has historically been split across many divides (e.g., older immigrants vs. new arrivals, religious vs. non-religious Latinos, as well as differences based on country of origin). The immigration issue is helping to forge a more unified perspective around Latino rights and social justice. Also, as part of this new unified perspective, polling data indicate that Latinos anticipate heightened political mobilization in the future, including greater involvement in electoral politics.

Finally, this article moves from national level data about public opinion to examine differences in border state attitudes. One would imagine that two states like Arizona and California, adjacent states that both experience the impact of large numbers of irregular migrants crossing national borders, would share similar perspectives on the topic. This is not the case. While attitudes in Arizona have taken on a punitive character, corresponding to a dramatic increase in undocumented migration, attitudes in California are becoming more moderate over time. We suggest that one key factor influencing attitudes in California is the growth of the Latino population over the last two decades, particularly their unique perspective on immigration and their increased presence in community life and state politics.

Given the demographic changes currently projected for the nation, we believe that the analysis provided here suggests that Latinos will play an important role in shaping national public opinion about immigration in the future, particularly as Latinos begin to exercise social and political power at the local and state level. This will further heighten the complexity of attitudes toward immigration within the United States and will continue to create challenges for those wishing to characterize "the nation" with overly broad claims.

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