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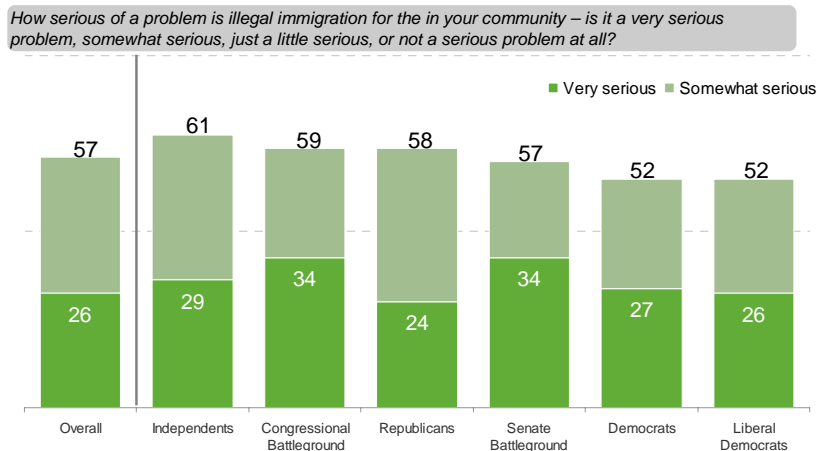
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WINNING THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE
A Report on New National Survey on Immigration

Few issues inspire so much passion as illegal immigration, but showing Democrats can address it will be a big signal to the country and build confidence in the Democrats' ability to lead the change more broadly. Many Americans, we wrote based on focus groups last month, believe the country's business and political leaders have lost control of the border, the workplace and government benefits – and seem indifferent or powerless to address it. Americans across the political spectrum, from liberal Democrats to conservative Republicans, consider illegal immigration to be a serious problem and are looking for political leaders to solve it.¹

Illegal immigration seen as serious problem



¹ Democracy Corps national survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted November 29 - December 3, 2007 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.

Democracy Corps with Greenberg Quinlan Rosner devoted all of its national survey of December 3, 2007, and part of another just completed to this issue. As you will see in this report, voters want to know first, that leaders ‘get it’ – that they share their common sense frustration with the problem and second, that they will act against employers, on the borders and on government programs to get things under control. But most in the broad public hold positive views of the new immigrants and will support an inclusive American response, including a path to citizenship for the responsible, tax-paying and law-abiding – if they believe first that America has acted to get this national problem under control. They really want to hear that Democrats ‘get it’ – because it says a lot about the Democrats’ values and ability to solve real problems.

This issue, as we will see below, is especially important in Congressional battleground districts and states where views on illegal immigration are more negative. Failing to show real determination to get this problem under control costs incumbent Democrats votes. Actually starting down this road consolidates their support and increases trust on dealing with the issue compared to the Republicans. At the same time, Democrats are a national party whose inclusiveness is fundamental to its appeal and purpose. Voters are looking for a solution – after this era of failing on most major problems – that builds on our immigrant tradition.

We believe this is a progressive approach to illegal immigration that Democrats should embrace without apology. It combines acknowledgment of the problem, pragmatic and tough ideas to stem the flow of illegal immigration with a path to citizenship laden with the kinds of requirements that anyone should meet if they are to attain the honor of being an American citizen. This survey confirms the power of this approach with the electorate.

The following elements are essential components of a winning national Democratic approach on illegal immigration:

- ***Recognition of the problem: ‘get it.’*** Candidates ignore the issue at their peril. It is essential to convey an appreciation that illegal immigration is out of control and needs to be addressed immediately and seriously. If leaders do not show their own frustration with the problem, they will not be heard on this issue – and many others.
- ***Attack Bush for losing control of the problem.*** A strong critique of the Bush administration’s failure to address this issue shows that we understand the problem and empathize with voters’ frustration with the lack of leadership on this issue.
- ***Enforcement at both the border and with employers.*** Voters believe that controls at the borders and enforcement in the workplace have disappeared, allowing the problem to get out of control. They are particularly angry with companies that are looking for cheap labor, partially explaining why this is happening.

- ***Opposition to non-essential benefits.*** The public’s leading concern about illegal immigration is that the immigrants get access to non-essential government benefits at a time when government spending is squeezed and taxes are a burden. There is strong opposition to Medicaid, taxpayer-subsidized health care, for illegal immigrants. But they are also strongly opposed to drivers’ licenses, an implicit recognition of legal status and claim on benefits.
- ***Support for emergency health care and education.*** Most Americans accept access to emergency health care for illegal immigrants and education through high school for the children of illegal immigrants who are U.S. citizens.
- ***Positive views of new immigrants.*** Negative attitudes toward immigrants combine with a lot of respect – many in a new survey describing them as ‘hard working,’ ‘family-oriented’ and ‘trying to be good citizens.’ That creates an opening for an inclusive approach, based on America’s strength as an immigrant nation. There is strong support, for example, for undocumented immigrants in the U.S. military being able to win nearly immediate citizenship.
- ***Toward a solution: responsibility and a path to citizenship.*** A large majority of voters support a path to citizenship if we are serious about having to qualify for citizenship: expelling anyone who has committed a crime, others pay a fine and taxes, learn English, and get in the back of the queue. But if voters hear only the part about a path to citizenship without the responsibilities, they do not support this – and punish incumbent Democrats. But if Democrats ‘get it’ and are very serious about getting the problem under control, including benefits, their leaders can get support for solving this problem in ways consistent with our values.

A Deadly Serious Issue

With the problem out of control, voters believe immigrants are taking more from the country than they give. The public feels this way when asked only about “immigrants,” not even “illegal immigrants.” The view that immigrants take more than they contribute is most pronounced among some key demographic segments, including senior citizens and men with no more than a high school education. In congressional battleground districts, a clear majority (54 to 36 percent) believes immigrants take more from the country than they give.

That leads almost 40 percent of the voters to say that “immigration is among the country’s biggest problems” and reject the idea that immigration does not rank with our top problems, like Iraq, health care and energy independence. This is a top priority for a large bloc

of voters and cannot be swept aside. That includes 33 percent of Democrats and 42 percent of African-Americans.

When the focus turns to *illegal* immigrants, public opinion turns more negative. By a more than 2-1 margin, the public thinks illegal immigrants take more benefits such as education and health care than they contribute with work and taxes.

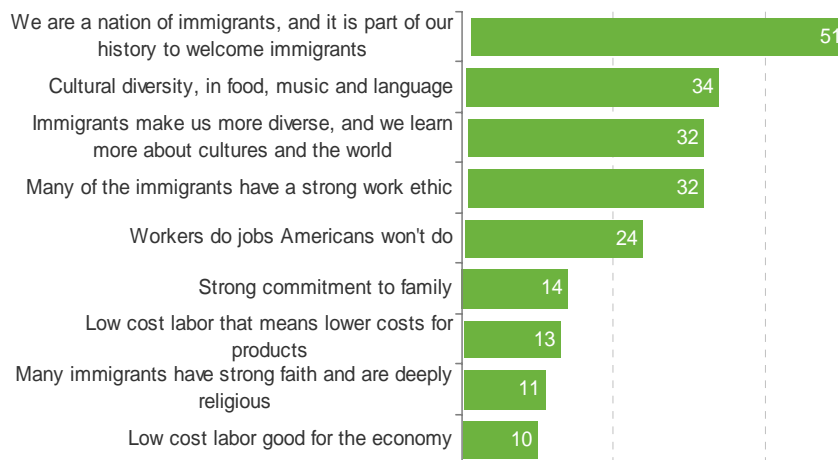
Positive Views of Immigration and Immigrants

At the same time, however, attitudes toward immigration are not wholly negative. By about two-to-one, voters think immigration is good for America.

Our country’s legacy of immigration has real resonance with people. It is by far the most positive aspect of immigration for Americans, followed by the greater cultural diversity that immigrants bring and their work ethic.

Nation’s legacy of immigration a powerful concept

Which two of the following is the most positive aspect of immigration to the United States?



In our most recent survey, a large majority of the public describes immigrants as hard-working, family-oriented and trying to be good citizens.²

Most Americans also recognize that America must provide essential services for illegal immigrants. Almost three-quarters support public education through high school for children of illegal immigrants who are American citizens, and more than three of five are in favor of access to hospitals and emergency rooms for illegal immigrants. There is also support for access to community health clinics and public schools for children here illegally, albeit by small margins.

Another factor that contributes to the overall positive perception of immigration is the sense that it is good for the U.S. economy. A majority believes immigration is good for the economy, a view held by independents by more than two-to-one. Relatively few voters perceive a threat to American jobs from immigration. By two-to-one, the public sees immigrants taking jobs other Americans won't do.

Among less well-off Americans, views on immigration's economic impact are more ambivalent, however. Those with less than a college education are evenly divided about whether immigration is good or bad for the economy. We should not assume that the concern with this issue is simply an attitude.

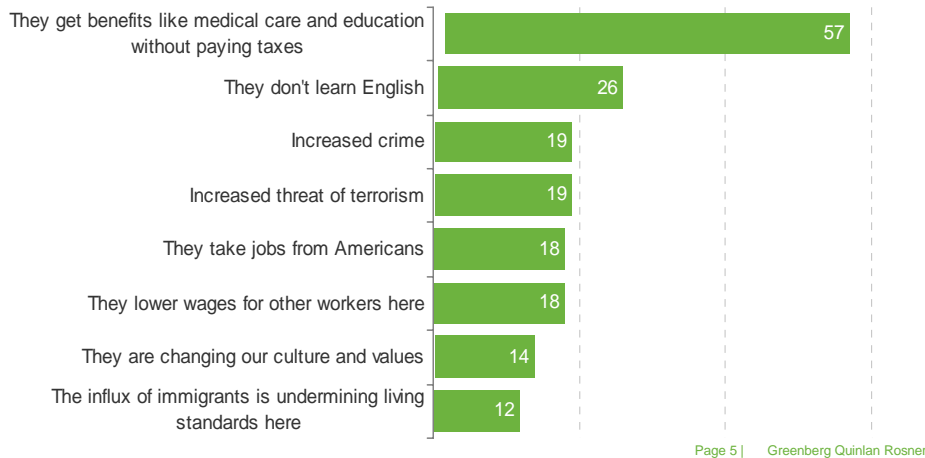
Concern over Benefits, Borders, and the Workplace

As Democrats address illegal immigration, the issue of benefits needs to be a key part of the discussion. Despite the support for emergency health care for illegal immigrants and public education for children, voters' top concern, by far, about illegal immigration is that the immigrants get benefits without paying taxes.

² Democracy Corps national survey of 1,024 likely voters conducted December 13 - 17, 2007 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.

Benefits tops concerns about illegal immigration

Which two of the following concerns you the most about illegal immigration to the United States?



Although, as noted, most Americans support public school and emergency medical care for illegal immigrants, there is strong opposition to other services, including Medicaid, college education, and driver’s licenses.

The findings about driver’s licenses are particularly notable. Not only do two-thirds of voters oppose driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants, but the argument that it improves safety fails to bring the figure any higher against the case that it rewards illegal behavior.

The workplace and the employer should be a central point in the Democratic narrative. First, it is the starting point for enforcement: four out of five voters favor tougher enforcement to prevent businesses from hiring illegal workers and over three-quarters want to double the number of border patrol agents. Later, we shall see that the Democrats’ strongest critique and message focuses on employers, freed from enforcement, taking advantage in creating a cheap labor force.

Strong support for tougher enforcement at border and in workplace

Now let me read you some immigration policies. For each one, please tell me whether you favor or oppose that measure.

	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
Deport illegal immigrants who commit a crime.	77	87
Tougher enforcement so businesses don't hire illegal workers.	60	80
Double the number of border patrol agents.	58	77
Cut off non-essential public services, such as welfare programs, to illegal immigrants.	48	65
Deport all illegal immigrants.	35	52
Build a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.	34	51

Support for Path to Citizenship

Voters are desperate for leaders who will take responsibility and really solve problems. So while there are large and intense majorities in favor of the most punitive of measures, such as deportation of all illegal immigrants who commit crimes, there is also broad backing for solutions that would help the most responsible illegal immigrants stay in the country and integrate into society. Voters are saying there is a path to citizenship that is based on immigrants taking responsibility for becoming full members of society. For example, nearly two-thirds of likely voters, including a majority of self-described conservatives, support a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants who pay a fine and learn English.

Policies to help

	Total		Conservatives	
	Strongly Favor	Total Favor	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
Provide expedited citizenship to legal immigrants who serve in the U.S. military.	52	76	48	75
Allow illegal immigrants who pay a fine and learn English to be eligible to apply for citizenship.	39	64	34	55
Implement a guest worker program to allow immigrants to work here for a set period of time.	37	76	32	72
Allow illegal immigrants who pay a fine and learn English to be eligible for legal status, but not citizenship.	22	59	22	56

(Notably, there is less support for providing legal status short of citizenship. Americans want to reward people who are here and trying to earn citizenship – an American tradition.)

That Democrats’ approach the issue in this way allows Democrats to continue to be the open party that wins support in suburbs, in urban areas and that is becoming the indispensable party among Hispanic voters.

Despite the support for a path to citizenship, messages that include it are less effective than messages that refer only to enforcement. When we ask respondents to evaluate messages individually, there is particular appeal for cracking down on unscrupulous corporations that exploit illegal and legal workers. Voters are eager to believe that companies’ preferences for cheap labor are a source of the problem.

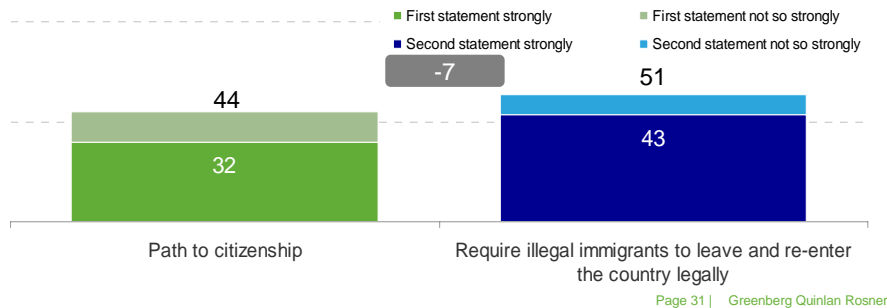
Democratic message urging crackdown on employers tops list

<i>After I read each statement, please tell me whether this would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support this Democratic candidate for Congress in 2008.</i>	Much More Likely	Much/Smwht More likely	Total More Likely
We need to put an end to illegal immigration by cracking down on unscrupulous corporations who exploit illegal and legal workers. When corporations hire illegal workers, all workers lose, as wages come down, and basic worker rights are lost. We must prosecute corporations that hire illegal immigrants to protect the rights of all workers.	38	63	75
We need to end illegal immigration - period. We need a plan to secure our borders by doubling the number of border patrols; end the job magnet by imposing tougher fines on employers who hire illegal workers; and prevent illegal immigrants from receiving non-essential services.	37	59	72
Immigration to the United States is a privilege, not a right. To keep it as a privilege, we must secure our border; ensure that employers hire only legal workers; and restrict services, such as higher education and driver's privileges, to people here legally.	36	57	69

When voters select between two comparative messages, the tougher one also comes out on top. A message about enforcement bests a message about enforcement-plus-citizenship by 7 points.

Language with path to citizenship loses

We need tougher controls at the borders and penalties on employers who hire illegal immigrants, bar illegal immigrants from getting most government benefits, and expel convicted criminals, while allowing the law-abiding and tax-paying immigrants to remain and get on a long path to citizenship.
 OR
We need to get control of the border, require illegal immigrants to leave and re-enter the country legally, stop illegal immigrants from getting government benefits, and send illegal immigrants who are convicted criminals back to their home country.



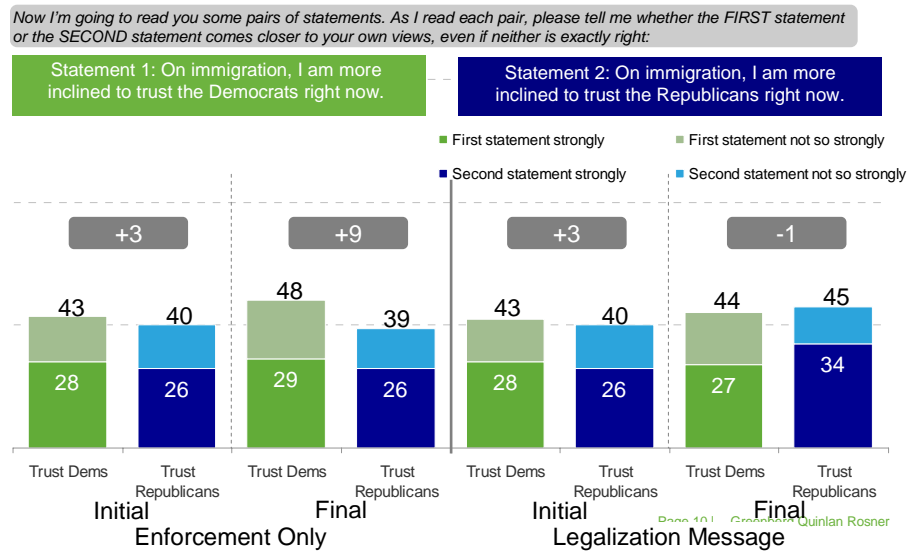
It is clear that voters must hear decisively that Democrats get it and want to get things under control – and then, the solution that restores our lawful immigrant tradition.

Risks for Democrats

The approach proposed here has a real opportunity to consolidate the Democrats’ current national lead and build its base as well, though there are risks particularly in battleground districts, if they don’t get the steps right, starting with frustration with the problem and enforcement.

In our survey, we conducted a test. Half of the respondents were read enforcement-only messages from the Democrats (as well as Republican statements); the other half were read Democratic statements all of which talked about some form of legalization and permanence for the 12 million illegal immigrants (along with the Republican messages). Among those who heard the enforcement-only messages, the Democratic advantage over Republicans on the immigration issue rose from 3 points to 9 points, as independents shifted toward the Democrats. Among those who heard the consistent legalization messages, the Democratic advantage became a 1-point deficit.

Enforcement-only messages produce shift toward Democrats



The legalization message also had a dramatic impact on the vote in Democratic-held congressional districts, turning a 34-point advantage into a 25-point lead, due to losses among independents and Democrats. The most uncommitted voters – people who say they are undecided in the race for president – led the shift away from the Democrats.

Tougher enforcement, therefore, is a key starting point in a Democratic plan. It can help lay the groundwork and provide reassurance for plans that include support for essential services and a path to citizenship. In some districts, the Democratic candidates will do well with a message that focuses on enforcement and chiding the elites and both parties who failed to get control of the borders and workplaces. Nationally, Democrats should be critical of George Bush for losing control of this problem and should re-enforce its identity as the party that seeks inclusive solutions. The country is ready to support a party that really solves the problems that have left America hobbled.