



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

Synthesis of Research Findings

Public Opinion on Immigration

About This Report

This report synthesizes public opinion research on key immigration issues in the United States at the time of its writing. Its findings were shared at The Opportunity Agenda's Immigration Messaging Forum, part of the 2008 Immigration Communications Summit hosted by The Four Freedoms Fund in May, 2008.

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The report analysis and writing by Kalahn Taylor-Clark. It was edited by Tony Stephens.

About The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda works across social justice issues to build public support for greater opportunity in America. With a growing community of partners that spans diverse issues and constituencies—human rights, racial equality, immigration, health care, labor rights, education, criminal justice, and others—we work to move hearts and minds as well as public policy and political discourse. Over time, our activities will achieve: (1) measurably better media coverage that shifts the public debate; (2) visibly improved public support for social justice values and policies; and (3) greater capacity within social justice organizations and movements to communicate our shared values and vision for America.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Public Opinion on Immigration

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Introduction

We conducted a comprehensive assessment of literature, public opinion, and focus groups on immigration issues in the United States. The main objectives of this synthesis are to a) provide a baseline for understanding current public attitudes toward immigration issues, b) highlight current trends in public attitudes toward immigration over time, c) identify public support for immigration policy alternatives by demographic groupings, and d) provide recommendations for advocacy and policy interests seeking to frame immigration issues in the news media.

To achieve these objectives, we analyzed the research in three phases. First, we reviewed current literature on public opinion and immigration policy. Second, we synthesized existing public opinion polling data and focus group research to disentangle current attitudes and trends toward ‘undocumented’ immigrant issues. Third, we conducted a brief media analysis, in which we explored news coverage of ‘undocumented immigration issues’ during two periods where public support ‘spiked’ for allowing undocumented workers to stay in the U.S. Finally, based on our findings we provided recommendations for framing the immigration debate.

This report is divided into five sections. First, we provide a brief literature review on current research regarding public opinion on immigration. In Sections II and III, we provide an overview and major findings from public opinion polls and focus group work in the area. Based on our findings, in Section IV we outline communication recommendations and next steps for framing the immigration debate. Finally, we provide detailed methodology, appendices, and a selected bibliography.

SECTION II

Literature Review on Immigration and Public Opinion

Literature Review

Immigrant Population Overview

In 2007, the nation's immigrant population (documented and undocumented¹) reached a record of 37.9 million people, with nearly one in three having undocumented status (Camaroti, 2007).

More than half of the total foreign-born population originated in Latin America, with Mexico by far the single largest source. This trend indicates a large change from the early 19th and 20th centuries, when a vast majority of the foreign-born population originated in Europe (Congressional Business Office, 2006). Over the past several years, the foreign-born population has been fairly geographically concentrated in specific U.S. States, with the greatest population increases occurring in California, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Arizona, Virginia, Maryland, Washington, Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania (Camaroti, 2007; Congressional Business Office, 2006).

Public Perceptions and General Views on Immigration

Most Americans are concerned about the growing immigrant population in one way or another, but the nature and intensity of those concerns vary by different segments of the population (Pew Research Center, 2006). Two important trends are affecting Americans' views regarding immigrants and issues related to immigration. First, greater numbers of immigrants entering the United States, legally and illegally, have meant dramatic changes for immigration laws and policies (Congressional Budget Office, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Second, the attacks of September 11, 2001 intensified some of the early growing concern over immigration (Esses, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2002; Hitlan et al., 2007). However, a 2004 NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, shows that public views on immigration are significantly less negative than they were in the months after the terrorist attacks, down from 59 percent in 2001 to 49 percent in 2004 (NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, 2004).

It remains unclear as to what Americans really want and what they think needs to be done regarding immigration. Do Americans want fewer immigrants, better enforcement of current, or reforms and new immigration laws (Teixeira, 2006)? The literature also documents a range of conflicting views about the impact of immigration, particularly both the positive and negative views and attitudes toward 'legal' and 'illegal' immigrants (Congressional Business Office, 2006; Esses, et al., 2001; Fetzer, 2000; Mullen, 2001; Mullen, Rozell, & Johnson, 2000).

¹ As a distinction, throughout this document we will use the terms 'undocumented' and 'documented' to refer to immigrant status. However, we will use the terms 'illegal' and 'legal' when sources specifically use that terminology.

Importance of Public Views Regarding Immigration

Esses et al. (2002) have suggested that public attitudes about immigration are important for three reasons. First, public attitudes are likely to influence public policy because governments pay attention to public attitudes and take attitudes into account in formulating and implementing policy, for example immigration policies. Second, public attitudes about immigration are important because they can influence individuals' daily behavior, which in turn may affect the success and satisfaction of immigrants and the overall social climate of a particular nation. Third, public attitudes toward immigration can influence the collective vision of national identity and the perception of who is and who is not considered a member of the national group.

Recent Trends in Public Views about Immigration

Overall, recent trends suggest that the American public clearly draws a distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' immigration and are far more concerned with immigration issues around 'illegal' immigrants with feelings being a mix of admiration and concern (The Pew Center 2006). A synthesis of general views on immigration reveals that Americans: a) believe that immigration is a growing and serious problem, b) are most concerned with 'illegal' immigrants, c) favor a tough, but not punitive approach to immigration enforcement, and d) support a generous immigration reform provision to deal with 'illegal' immigrants, including a path to citizenship (Teixeira, 2006).

In the Pew Research Center for the People and Press and the Pew Hispanic Center's joint survey (Pew Research Center, 2006), similar public views relate to increasing concern about immigration, over which the American public is largely divided. The analysis also revealed that many believe that newcomers to the U.S. *strengthen* American society compared to those who say they threaten traditional American values. Over the long term, positive views of Latin American immigrants have drastically improved (Pew Research Center, 2006).

Although the Iraq war, dissatisfaction with the government, and terrorism were some issues that generally rank higher on the public agenda (Pew Research Center, 2006; Gallup poll, 2008), approximately 27 percent of Americans believe that 'illegal' immigration is one of two most important issues in the 2008 election (Gallup poll, 2008; CAP poll, 2008) (Slide). Still, public views are divided over many of the policy proposals aimed at addressing undocumented immigrant issues in the U.S. Fifty-three percent say people who are in the U.S. illegally should be required to go home, while 40 percent say they should be granted some type of legal status that allows 'illegal' immigrants

to stay in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2006). Additionally, nearly half of individuals believed 'illegal' immigrants should be required to leave; yet, some believe that some immigrants should be allowed to stay under a temporary work program. Divisions also exist over how to manage the flow of illegal immigrants across the Mexican border (Slide).

Public Views Regarding Particular Immigrant Groups

The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey (2004) revealed that a solid majority of Americans believe it is a good thing that people from Asia, Mexico and Latin America come to live and work in the United States. About six-in-ten Americans express positive views about Asian (61%) and Latin American (57%) immigrants (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2005).

Fewer persons believe that either Latin American or Asian immigrants end up on welfare or increase crime. Approximately eight-in-ten Americans believe that Latino and Asian immigrants are hard working and have strong family values. However, a number of people believe Asian and Latin American immigrants are reluctant to "assimilate" (Pew Research Center, 2006). Further, older persons (55-65+) and persons who live in places with few foreign-born residents are more likely to hold negative opinions about Hispanics (Pew Research Center, 2006).

In the U.S., public views toward immigration (from Mexico and other Latin American countries) are also reflective of partisan difference. Democrats (61%) welcome immigrants from these countries, compared to Republicans (53%). However, both Democrats (62%) and Republicans (59%) say that it is a good thing that Asians come to live and work in the United States (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007).

When broken down further by race, White Americans tend to view immigration more negatively with respect to taxes, crime, and moral and social values, while Black Americans more frequently perceive a negative effect on job opportunities and the economy (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007).

These divisions make framing the debate on immigration particularly important. To be sure, as Democrats 'take back' immigration as an issue, it will be necessary to balance short- and long-term goals for national immigration policy. Thus, communicating a unified message, which speaks to the concerns of voters, will be imperative to elevating the issue on the public agenda. At the same time, messages must be consistent with long-term goals, and must not stymie future efforts toward equitable immigration policy, which will be imperative to developing sustainable public policy.

SECTION III

Public Opinion on Immigration: Synthesis of Polling Data

Introduction

The American public seems ambivalent over the problems, causes and solutions to immigration issues. The following synthesis outlines themes drawn from 25 state- and national surveys, which were collected between 2006-2008.

Views of Immigration as a Political Issue

Over the past two years, a majority of Americans have viewed immigration as a ‘good thing’ for the country. At the same, they have shown greater ambivalence regarding whether immigration helps or hurts the country, which coincides with views about whether undocumented immigrants should be allowed to remain in the United States.

At the time of this report’s drafting, voters have consistently prioritized ‘illegal immigration’ as a major issue in the 2008 presidential campaign, with an average of 27% of voters saying that the issue should be one of two top priorities for the government to address. While Americans are most concerned about social service provisions for undocumented people, they are also likely to perceive the impact of ‘illegal’ immigration as a threat to American jobs.

‘Legal’ vs. ‘Illegal’ Immigration

In general, Americans are substantially more supportive of ‘legal’ over ‘illegal’ immigrant rights. At the same time, in the absence of such descriptors, some evidence suggests a majority of Americans are likely to believe that ‘immigrant issues’ are inexplicably linked to ‘illegal’ immigrant issues. Two points support this claim. First, anecdotal evidence from a public opinion poll taken in a state showed that pollsters mistakenly inserted the word ‘legal’ before describing immigration. When this was noticed, pollsters re-conducted the survey and found almost no difference when leaving the words ‘illegal’ or ‘legal’ out of the phraseology, as when they were included. Second, a Pew Research Center for People and Politics survey showed that a plurality of Americans were concerned about the threat to ‘American jobs,’ when asked about their biggest concern regarding immigration (generally).

Support for policy alternatives

In general, Americans are most supportive of employer penalties when dealing with undocumented workers.

Who sees immigration as a ‘problem’?

The target groups include demographic groups who believe that health care opportunities are unequal for racial/ethnic minorities, and would support government interventions:

- Hispanics, who are voters;
- Young people (18-24) of all educational backgrounds (except on issues of perceptions of immigrants as a source of cultural diversity and/or labor);
- Self-identified progressives and Independents; Moderate ideology

SECTION IV

Synthesis of Focus Group Data

Introduction

In the second research synthesis, we analyzed themes from 3 focus groups exploring Americans' views of immigration in the United States. The analysis identifies trends and emerging themes specifically related to the following, a) public views regarding immigration (generally), b) specific areas/issues that the public feel most 'positively/negatively' about, c) who cares about immigration.

The three focus groups were conducted by partners of The Opportunity Agenda.² The synthesis identifies trends and emerging themes specifically related to the following:

- 1) Public's general views on immigration (i.e. generally positive, negative, moving one way or the other, or basically and consistently ambivalent)
- 2) Immigration issues people feel most positively/negatively about (i.e. immigrant integration or hurting American labor, respectively)
- 3) Extent to which we can identify clusters of people, such as whole-hearted supporters, on-the-fencers, flip-floppers, or die hard opponents.

The findings of this synthesis indicate several prevalent themes related to public perceptions toward immigrants and immigration issues. The emerging themes center around: 1) a negative connotation of the term "immigrant", 2) immigrants as economic competitors, 3) lack of immigrant media coverage and awareness, 4) perceptions of strong immigrant work ethic and family values, 5) ambivalence toward enforcement of immigration control, 6) due process and human rights, and 7) discrimination.

To further illustrate the categories, selected participant quotes are presented and denoted by comments in quotation marks. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study provides a synthesis of African Americans' views on immigration. As these findings represent a synthesis of participant responses and not direct quotes from participants, paraphrased quotes are presented.

"Immigrant": A Negative Connotation

For many Americans, the term "immigrant" carries negative connotations. Several people acknowledge that when they hear the term "immigrant," they associate the term with illegal immigrants. Further, reminding people of their own immigrant backgrounds and connections does little to garner empathy toward immigrants today.

² For more information on the methodologies used to develop themes from focus groups, see Section VI.

“When I hear ‘immigration’, I think of ‘illegal’ immigrants.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

Words associated with immigrants, “wetback,” “illegal Mexican”.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

Immigrants as Economic Competitors

The stereotypical theme that immigrants are “takers and not givers” resonated soundly across gender and racial and ethnic groups. Focus group participants had strong perceptions about immigrants as economic competitors with other U.S. groups, who take unfairly from the system. Examples cited were a) a strong belief that immigrants do not pay taxes, b) that immigrants receive small business loans and can start business easier than some groups that were born here, c) that immigrants are a drain on social services in the United States, and d) that even while in the U.S., immigrants continue to send their money home and not invest in this country. African Americans were particularly concerned about these issues. African Americans, especially blue-collar African American men in particular, were likely to feel that they are losing economic ground. African Americans also resent the language and messages that imply immigrants take the jobs Americans do not want. Immigrants themselves also voiced concern over the stereotypical economic notions and messages about them.

“They’re not even paying taxes, they’re not even contributing to the system, and that does bother me.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

They are docile, willing to take lower pay and endure worse conditions and undercut African Americans in the job market.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

“It is outsourcing within our own borders.”

African American

“A lot of people think we came to take work away from them and that’s why they mistrust us, because they think we came here to take jobs away from them.”

Mexican [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

“I’m going to give you the stereotypes about the men and the women. The men come to work selling drugs. And the women come to live off welfare. And it’s not true. Even the people who work as housekeepers are professionals in their own country.”

Dominican [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

Immigrants as ‘undeserved’ recipients of social services

Six focus groups conducted in Connecticut by The Opportunity Agenda and funded by the Connecticut Health Foundation, showed little variability in perceptions of the most important health issues across the racially stratified groups. However, White residents were very passionate about the impact of undocumented immigrants upon an already overburdened health care system. Of note, immigrants were discussed mostly as “illegal” persons coming from Central and South America.

White Male Participant: “(The major problem is...) the aliens, illegal aliens coming in”

White Female Participant: “They are taking away from people who are U.S. citizens”

Lack of Media Coverage and Awareness

Many participants indicated that they tend to get information regarding immigration from their friends and families and rarely from the media and government. Several thought mainstream media and government are biased, and are not eagerly nor equitably disseminating balanced information about immigration issues to all groups in society. This is seen by many as a problem, as information about immigration and reform is not reaching all segments of the population.

“As a Muslim, what I’m complaining, or what I can see is not right, is the coverage of Islam in the news media. It doesn’t separate between the terrorists and Muslims. Sometimes I wonder, I’m asking myself, where are we going? If the media goes with this pace, with this kind of preaching, it’s obvious you hear from some people, they’re talking about Islam very different than—you think, ‘Am I a Muslim?’”

East African [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

“Denial of due process to immigrants is probably going on; it’s just not being publicized because it’s not big news.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

More likely to get my news on immigration from family and friends than the news media or government.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

Strong Immigrant Work Ethic and Family Values

Many participants praise immigrant groups for their hard working work ethic and strong family values. Immigrants themselves also expressed the importance of education and family as well.

“They have a strong dedication toward education and the ability to start businesses and hold onto them for generations.”

African American

“My children were born in Mexico, but I have them here and I see in this country, they’re going to have a better education. It’s easier for me financially to give them a good education here because in Mexico, if I earn minimum wage, it doesn’t matter how intelligent they are, they will not be able to study more – even if your child is brilliant, you will not be able to afford a college education so the opportunities that are available for my children here as far as their education are very important.”

Mexican [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

“I think most Americans accept us because they consider us good workers.”

Mexican [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

Ambivalence toward Enforcement

Many participants have a great deal of empathy for the legal situation immigrants find themselves in and are somewhat ambivalent toward the laws and enforcement. First, they feel they don’t know enough about the laws and policies as clear and complete information has not reached them. Second, on one hand they believe immigrants help American society economically and culturally, but on the other hand, some participants believe illegal immigrants, in particular, are breaking the law and draining the U.S. system by not paying taxes while taking advantage of the free benefits they are afforded. Others are frustrated and angry with the government for setting up a system that does not work and that is out of control. The U.S. immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed, but participants were unsure what to do about it. Most agreed tougher enforcement and secure borders are needed and this theme really was widespread among African Americans. African Americans were also adamant that U.S. employers hiring illegal immigrants should be punished and workplace regulations enforced.

“Why do we even have immigration laws if anyone can just walk over the border and stay here for 10 years?”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

Tough enforcement consists of tougher controls at the border, tougher enforcement of laws, including those for employers.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

Due Process and Human Rights

Illegal immigrants' human rights, due process, and fair treatment resonated overwhelmingly with many groups. Some felt that if persons are illegal they should not have the same rights as American citizens. Others raised questions of what the Constitution or U.S. laws say about rights of people who are not citizens. Still, for some, the American way is to give due process to all people, and they should be treated fairly no matter what. Many participants felt that even though illegal immigrants have broken the law, they should still be treated fairly. The concern is not just that immigrants should be treated fairly but that everyone should be given due process. If immigrants are being treated unfairly and not given due process, what does this say about the U.S. justice system. Further, could this unfair treatment at some point be applied to legal citizens as well?

"It sounds like you're [immigrants] guilty until proven innocent."

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

The system is broken and needs to be fixed.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

"If you are an illegal immigrant, then you don't enjoy all the rights and privileges that a citizen does."

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

“I’m caught in between the two. If you’re an illegal immigrant, you shouldn’t be given the same rights as a citizen of this country, but at the same time, it’s more fair to say if you obey our laws you’ll be protected by our laws. Denying due process is wrong, but I’m kind of torn between the two.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

“It’s not what America stands for, it’s treating them like cattle, it’s not giving them basic rights as human beings, and that’s not what America stands for to me.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

Discrimination

Discrimination against residents was another theme that resonated among various groups. Clearly discrimination and stereotypes about immigrants exist. White and African American respondents expressed that the immigrants of today are not like the immigrants of the past. Immigrants do not invest in this country, nor do they make many contributions, and in return they do not pay taxes and want to drain the system of all that they can. When thinking about which groups are most adversely affected by discrimination, respondents mentioned African Americans, Latinos, Arabs, and Middle Easterners. In particular, Arabs and Middle Easterners were considered especially discriminated against since 9/11. African Americans expressed that they do not share a sense of empathy because they see their civil rights struggles as different from those of immigrants.

They are immediately eligible for welfare and crowd into emergency rooms for health care services they could not get in their own countries.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

African Americans are the most discriminated against and Latinos are the second most discriminated against.

African American

[The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund Study, 2007]

“I think my grandparents made more contributions when they came here than the ones who come over the border now because they wanted to be legal. The ones who are here today, they don’t give to this country like the immigrants did before.”

Caucasian [Breakthrough Study, 2007]

Many immigrant respondents also voiced the pain of discrimination and stereotypes from Americans.

“If one is not a U.S. citizen, unfortunately, one is like a lower class citizen. Simply for not having the U.S. citizenship. And the way they treat you at work, in any type of setting, at least in my case, I feel it is because of the citizenship issue that I feel discriminated against.”

Central American [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

“They think we are very poor. One of my daughter’s classmates asked her, ‘Do some people stay in a hut?’ And my daughter said, ‘No. I’m going to have a house like yours.’”

Indian [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

“Sometimes they ask ‘Are you a terrorist? Do you have a gun?’ They’re checking your bags like crazy.”

Pakistani [New Immigrant Study, 2006]

Overview

The qualitative findings presented here provide insight about the perceptions and attitudes toward immigrants, both documented and undocumented, in America. These findings illustrate strong themes around the negative connotation of the term “immigrant,” immigrants as economic competitors, lack of media coverage and awareness of immigrant issues, strong immigrant work ethic and family values, ambivalence toward immigrant enforcement, due process and human rights, and discrimination. These themes are also helpful in addressing the initial research questions:

What trends emerge in the existing research regarding the public’s general views on immigration? Is it generally positive, negative, moving one way or the other, or basically and consistently confused?

Emerging trends regarding general views on immigration show a great amount of ambivalence regarding immigration, laws, and policy. In part, this is due to the lack of awareness and unclear messages about immigration that have not reached all segments of the population. This finding should spawn further research in how immigration messages are developed and disseminated to various groups and how these issues are covered by various media organizations.

Another trend among groups is the overwhelming support for fairness and due process, which should be afforded to immigrants (particularly undocumented immigrants) who find themselves in legal situations. Although some believed that the 'illegal' status of some immigrants should compel limited due process, most supported fairness and due process, which was noted as a basic human right that should be afforded to all people regardless of their status. Many connected the unfairness seen toward immigrants to a broken U.S. system that has allowed immigration problems to get 'out of hand.' Several respondents expressed concerns of media coverage, which paints a poor picture of immigrant treatment--without due process--in America. Additionally, most people felt that immigrants in the U.S. face unfair discrimination. Several respondents also cited widespread examples of discrimination and stereotypes toward immigrants.

Generally, most views reflected a range from positive to negative, or just unsure about many issues regarding immigrants. Again, part of this indecisiveness rests with varying messages about immigration and immigrant groups. People feel they are just not getting clear and complete messages about immigration challenges. However, whether accurate or not, people feel that the government is not doing enough to solve the issue and in many cases are treating illegal immigrants unfairly. This particular message is definitely out there among many segments of the population. There are positive views around the strong work ethic and cultural values that immigrants contribute, and negative opinions around the notion that illegal immigrants are breaking the law and draining the U.S. system of benefits and resources that could be used for citizens. People are mostly ambivalent and conflicted about how to solve the problems.

In what areas/issues do people feel most positively about immigration and most open to immigrant integration?

Those familiar with the various immigrant laws and programs such as the amnesty bill, or guest worker programs felt positive about these programs. However, some did express concern when it comes to the actual implementation of the programs and the difficulty in tracking guest workers.

Some also felt that guest worker programs would depress wages even more. Other views emphasized efforts to have more security at borders and stronger penalties of U.S. employers who employ illegal immigrants, but felt that even more needed to be done. Many felt these two issues could help to drive more reform.

In what areas/issues are they most negative?

There was a lot of negativity around the implication that immigrants do jobs that other Americans, especially African Americans will not do. Many hold the view that immigrants are lowering the wages in the U.S. Others expressed concern that immigrants are making English in the U.S. the second language. People are clearly negative about immigrants not paying taxes, investing in the U.S., sending their money home, and taking advantage of free benefits here. A number of respondents indicated that illegal immigrants should not receive any rights at all in America.

To what extent can we identify clusters of people, such as whole-hearted supporters, on-the-fencers, flip-floppers, or die hard opponents?

In various racial and ethnic groups, there is a range of people who could be identified as supporter, on-the-fencer, flip-flopper, or die hard opponent. This will depend greatly on the particular issue being discussed or presented to them around immigration. However, there are some issues that resonated with some groups more than others. For example, African Americans are die-hard opponents of tougher enforcement of laws and stronger security at the borders, yet they resent any linkage and connection that their struggles and fight as African Americans are the same as those of illegal immigrants.

It is also clear that both African Americans and White Americans are whole-hearted supporters of fair treatment and due process to immigrants and all people. Their concern here is not just that all immigrants are treated fairly but that if the U.S. system gets away with treating a particular group unfairly, this unfair treatment could be applied to other groups as well.

When it comes to resolving various immigration issues around illegal immigrants and whether the laws, bills, or programs in place will work, you see many flip-floppers. Many individuals feel they just don't have enough information and have not followed the debate closely enough. Overall, many are divided about the overall impact of immigration.

SECTION V

Implications of Syntheses on Strategic Communication Plan

In aggregate, these findings have important implications for creating a strategic communication strategy to influence a media and advocacy agenda on these issues.

Framing ‘undocumented’ v ‘documented’ immigrant issues

- Research shows that when the term ‘immigrant’ is used alone, specifically in relation to political issues, a majority of Americans are likely to consider ‘undocumented’ immigrant issues as a major problem. Using consistent terminology will be helpful here.

Biggest concern regarding ‘immigration’ (generally) is the perceived threat to American jobs

- Attaching this issue to universal health care coverage issues may be one way to increase support for targeted provisions for immigrants.
- How can the immigration issue be moved from an economic concern to one of human rights?

Americans are less likely to support social service provisions than they are to support educational provisions for undocumented children.

- How might judicial action play a role in perception – Plyler v. Doe (1982).
- One reason for this concern may have to do with rising health care costs (and lower quality services) for Americans.
- Attaching this issue to Universal Healthcare Coverage issues may be one way to increase support for targeted provisions for immigrants.

Considerations for targeted audiences

We have identified three target groups that may be ambivalent about their stand on immigration issues, and with ‘more information’ may be supportive of policy alternatives:

- Hispanics, all ages, who are voters;
- Self-identified politically progressive or moderate;
- Working class status; higher SEP;
- Women (self identified politically progressive)

Challenging audiences

- ≤ High school educational status
- Self-reported conservative ideology
- Aged 55+

Considerations for future research

Media analyses

- Public ambivalence over immigration may shift with media coverage of the issues. For example, in December of 2005, and again in 2007, Americans shifted their views about whether immigration helps or hurts America.
- Media analyses that uncover frames of a) problem definition, b) causes of problems, and c) solutions to problems, will be imperative to better understanding public attitudes.

Public opinion and focus groups

- Testing message frames from media analyses will be critical here.

Specific Frames (Example)

Education for all is a basic human right...

- Overall, Americans are very supportive of providing education to undocumented immigrant children,

BUT, dwindling healthcare resources are a main concern for everyone.

- This means that concerns about constrained social resources may increase opposition to provisions of social services, such as health care.

SECTION VI

Detailed Methodology

Public Opinion Polls

We analyzed 5 state-wide and 23 national public opinion polls. All of the polls were conducted between January 2006 and April 2008, with a margin of error ranging from $\pm 2 - \pm 3$ percentage points. We analyzed questions that were asked in some form in at least two other sources. Thus, the synthesis reveals multi-method differences in public opinion (i.e. question wording).

When groups are said to differ, they are statistically variable at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

Focus Groups

The focus group method allows researchers to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in an in-depth manner not feasible using other methods such as observation, one-on-one interviewing, or questionnaires. These attitudes, feelings, and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or social setting, but are more likely to be revealed through social gatherings and the interaction of a focus group (Krueger, 1994). As a result, focus groups produced in-depth, detailed data about participants' perceptions about health issues both nationally and locally within their communities.

Data and Methods

In assessing the public's perceptions and general views on immigration, this examination draws upon findings from three qualitative research studies conducted to assess public perceptions of immigrants' human rights, due process, and the role of religion and new immigrants to America. We reviewed data from three focus group studies from: 1) Breakthrough USA, a New York based nonprofit organization working to show that immigration is a human rights issue and current laws are affecting all immigrants, legal and undocumented (study conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart in December 2007), 2) new immigrants and religious communities: religious adaptation and pluralism in the American religious landscape commissioned by Douglas Coull and Company, funded by the Ford Foundation (study conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research), and 3) The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund study (conducted by Lake Research Partners) which assessed the perceptions of African Americans about immigrants.

Focus group methodology was utilized in all three studies to provide a rich and in-depth understanding of the public's perceptions and attitudes about immigration in the U.S. Focus groups can be used in isolation or to complement or supplement quantitative methods, but are not normally used to quantify public attitudes on issues and are not generalizable to the population as a whole (Creswell, 2004). As such, focus groups proved to be a serviceable method for the topic of

immigration and related issues and exploring closely attitude formation and discovering the range of opinion and beliefs on immigration. These studies were selected based on their rigorous execution of the methodology and the rich and salient data yielded from each of the focus group studies.

Study Designs

The first study reviewed consisted of four focus groups conducted on November 19 and 20, 2007 by Belden, Russonello, & Stewart. Focus groups were conducted among liberal Caucasians and young people in Chicago and New York City. One group in each city was composed of young adults (18-24), and the other group was composed of liberal, Caucasian adults between 30 and 60. The young adult group in New York was composed of Asian American, African American, and Latino participants.

In the second study, new immigrant and religious communities, focus groups were conducted in April and May 2005, by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research. Focus groups were comprised of the following groups: Indian Hindus (Chicago), East African Muslims (Washington, DC), Dominican Catholics (New York), Pakistani Muslims (Chicago), Arab Muslims (Detroit); Central American Evangelicals (Miami), Mexican Catholics (Los Angeles), Chinese Christians (Los Angeles), and Nigerian Christians (Washington, DC). The average number of focus groups conducted was two.

In the third study, assessing African American perceptions, a total of four groups were conducted on. Two groups were held in Detroit, Michigan on July 5, 2007. One group was comprised of blue-collar African American men and the other group of mixed gender African Americans under age 40. Another two groups were conducted in Houston, Texas on July 11, 2007. There was one group of blue-collar African American women and one group of mixed gender, white collar African Americans.

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