

# THE FIELD POLL

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**CALIFORNIA VOTERS SOMEWHAT  
AMBIVALENT ABOUT GOVERNMENT  
POLICIES TOWARD ILLEGAL  
IMMIGRANTS LIVING HERE.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The latest Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley-Field Poll finds California voters to be somewhat ambivalent about how government should deal with the problem of illegal immigration. A large majority of voters (67%) supports allowing illegal immigrants currently in the country a path to citizenship if they meet certain requirements over a period of time.

However, voters do not accept granting them the same entitlements as legal residents. For example, by a 56% to 40% margin voters oppose allowing illegal immigrants to get California drivers' licenses. Larger margins oppose granting illegal immigrants the same discounts on tuition at the state's public universities as legal residents can get (61% oppose vs. 33% favor), or having access to the same government health and financial assistance benefits that legal residents are eligible for (65% oppose vs. 27% favor).

There are an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants living in the United States and how to deal with their status has long been a salient and volatile political issue which neither Presidents George W. Bush nor Barack Obama have been able to resolve. Meanwhile, there are debates about how illegal immigrants should be treated as long as they are in the United States. Controversies have centered on whether to grant illegal immigrant access to driver's licenses, in-state college tuition, and access to various government services.

**Californians support path to citizenship for illegal immigrants currently living here**

In the survey a random sample of California registered voters were first told "as you may know, there are an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, including approximately two and a half million living in California," and then asked which policy option came closest to their view about what government policy should be toward illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States. The three alternative approaches offered were mass deportation, temporary work permits, and a path to citizenship. In this setting, the large majority of California voters (67%)

support a path to citizenship. This compares to 14% who favor allowing temporary work permits and 13% support deportation.

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**Table 1**  
**What California voters say government policy should be toward illegal immigrants currently residing in the U.S.**

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Allow illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become citizens, but only if they meet certain requirements over a period of time	67%
Allow illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. to work, but only for a limited time	14
Deport all illegal immigrants back to their home country	13
No opinion/refused	6

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### **Views of Californians similar to those of other Americans**

These results are generally similar to the views that the overall American public have about this. When the same question was asked of a random sample of 1,020 Americans in June 2011 by the *Gallup Poll* 64% supported giving illegal immigrants currently living in the U.S. a path to citizenship. Another 21% favored deportation and 13% would allow grant illegal immigrants temporary work status.

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**Table 2**  
**What Americans say government policies should be toward the legal immigrants currently living in this country (*Gallup Poll*)**

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Allow illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become citizens, but only if they meet certain requirements over a period of time	64%
Allow illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. to work, but only for a limited time	13
Deport all illegal immigrants back to their home country	21
No opinion	2

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*Source: Gallup Poll conducted among 1,020 U.S. adults June 9-12, 2011.*

### **Variations in opinion across subgroups of the California electorate**

Large majorities of Democrats (79%) and independents (69%) support granting illegal immigrants a path to citizenship. This declines to 47% among Republicans, with 24% favoring work permits and another 24% mass deportation.

Latinos are strongest in their support (85%) of a path to citizenship among the state's ethnic populations. Six in ten (61%) white non-Hispanics favor the path to citizenship approach, as do 69% of the African-Americans and 77% of the Korean-Americans surveyed. Support is less among

Chinese-Americans (44%). While just 43% of Vietnamese-Americans offered their support for a path to citizenship, a large proportion (40%) chose not to offer an opinion.

Similar ethnic and partisan differences as those observed among California voters is seen nationally in the June 2011 *Gallup Poll*.

<b>Table 3</b>				
<b>What Californians say government policies should be toward the illegal immigrants currently living in this country – across voter subgroups (among California registered voters)</b>				
	<u>Path to citizenship</u>	<u>Temporary work permits</u>	<u>Deportation</u>	<u>No opinion/refused</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	79%	9	7	5
Republicans	47%	24	24	5
No party preference/others	69%	13	11	7
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	61%	17	16	6
Latino	85%	8	4	3
African-American*	69%	7	20	4
Chinese-American*	44%	29	17	10
Korean-American*	77%	11	6	6
Vietnamese-American*	43%	15	2	40
<u>Generational status</u>				
1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation American	72%	9	5	4
3 <sup>rd</sup> generation or later	64%	15	17	4
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	79%	6	11	4
Other Southern California	61%	21	15	3
San Francisco Bay Area	66%	14	7	13
Other Northern California	61%	16	19	4
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	65%	18	10	7
Female	68%	11	16	5
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 39	73%	11	10	6
40 – 49	70%	16	9	5
50 – 64	64%	12	17	7
65 or older	59%	17	19	5

\* Small sample base.

**Most voters oppose allowing illegal immigrants to get a California driver’s license**

By a 56% to 40% margin California voters oppose allowing illegal immigrants living in the state to get a California driver’s license. However, there are a number of differences in views about this across subgroups of the voting population.

For example, while a majority of Democrats (56%) support granting California driver’s licenses to illegal immigrants, three in four Republicans (77%) are opposed, as are 58% of independents.

Six in ten Latino voters (60%) favor issuing driver’s licenses to state residents who entered the country illegally, but greater than six in ten white non-Hispanics (63%) and African-Americans (62%) are opposed. Chinese-Americans are about evenly divided on this, while pluralities of the Korean-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans polled are opposed.

Opinions also differ between voters who are first or second generation Americans and those who are third or later generation Americans. Among the former granting illegal immigrants driver’s licenses is supported five to four (54% to 41%), while among the latter it is opposed nearly two to one (63% to 33%).

**Table 4**  
**Should illegal immigrants living in California be allowed to get a driver's license – overall and across voter subgroups (among California registered voters)**

	<b>Yes (agree)</b>	<b>No (disagree)</b>	<b>No opinion/ refused</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>4</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	56%	40	4
Republicans	20%	77	3
No party preference/others	38%	58	4
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	34%	63	3
Latino	60%	35	5
African-American*	27%	62	11
Chinese-American*	45%	45	10
Korean-American*	42%	55	3
Vietnamese-American*	34%	45	21
<u>Generational status</u>			
1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation American	54%	41	5
3 <sup>rd</sup> generation or later	33%	63	4

\* Small sample size.

**Opposition to giving illegal immigrants other entitlements that legal residents have**

Majorities oppose granting illegal immigrants the same entitlements that legal residents of the state get in two other areas – receiving tuition discounts at the state’s public universities (61% to 33%) and having access to government health and financial assistance benefits (65% to 27%).

Democrats and Latinos are more likely than other voters to support both policies, while voters in all other subgroups are opposed.

**Table 5**  
**Should illegal immigrants receive other entitlements as other residents**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion/ refused</u>
<b><u>Same tuition discount at state public universities</u></b>			
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>6</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	50%	44	6
Republicans	12%	82	6
No party preference/others	28%	66	6
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	25%	70	5
Latino	55%	39	6
African-American*	38%	50	12
Chinese-American*	31%	55	14
Korean-American*	30%	66	4
Vietnamese-American*	23%	51	26
<b><u>Same government health/financial assistance benefits</u></b>			
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	41%	51	8
Republicans	9%	82	9
No party preference/others	25%	68	7
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	22%	71	7
Latino	46%	47	7
African-American*	16%	73	11
Chinese-American*	14%	69	17
Korean-American*	19%	74	7
Vietnamese-American*	17%	55	28

\* Small sample size.

**Pluralities favor no change in number of immigrants allowed into the U.S. from Latin America and Asia**

Voters in the survey were also asked whether the number of immigrants allowed to come to live in the U.S. from Latin America and Asia should be increased, cut back or kept the same. In each case, pluralities or majorities of California voters favored keeping this at current levels.

Regarding the number of immigrants allowed into the U.S. from Latin America 45% favor keeping this at current levels, while 18% support increasing it and 26% favor reducing it. When the same question is asked about Asian immigrants 56% support keeping this the same, 10% favor increasing it and 19% decreasing it.

Chinese-Americans appear to be somewhat more likely than other voters to favor increasing the number of Asian immigrants allowed into the U.S.

**Table 6**  
**Should the number of immigrants from countries**  
**in (Latin America) (Asia) who are allowed to come to live in**  
**the U.S. legally be increased, kept the same or reduced?**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Increased</u>	<u>Kept the same</u>	<u>Reduced</u>	<u>No opinion/ refused</u>
<i>Number of immigrants allowed to live into U.S. from ...</i>				
<b><u>Latin America</u></b>				
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	24%	49	19	8
Republicans	9%	43	37	11
No party preference/others	19%	43	24	14
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	16%	44	29	11
Latino	27%	47	18	8
African-American*	29%	47	22	2
Chinese-American*	15%	49	21	15
Korean-American*	14%	33	41	12
Vietnamese-American*	27%	25	12	36
<b><u>Asia</u></b>				
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	12%	52	22	14
Republicans	7%	58	17	18
No party preference/others	10%	60	16	14
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	8%	58	18	16
Latino	11%	52	21	16
African-American*	10%	58	26	6
Chinese-American*	36%	46	7	11
Korean-American*	23%	51	12	14
Vietnamese-American*	18%	46	4	33

\* Small sample size.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Methodological Details**

This survey was conducted jointly by The Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley and The Field Poll September 6-18, 2012. Interviews were completed by landline and cell phone with 1,183 California registered voters in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize voter fatigue, the questions in the release were asked of random subsamples of either 571 or 612 registered voters.

Each sample was supplemented to include additional interviews among Chinese-American, Korean-American and Vietnamese-American voters for comparative purposes. Funding for the multi-ethnic samples was provided by New America Media, through a grant from the Blue Shield of California Foundation. After completion of interviewing, the sample was weighted to align it to the proper distribution of voters by race/ethnicity and other characteristics of the California registered voter population.

Up to six attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. Interviews were completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone. In this survey 909 interviews were conducted on a landline phone and 274 were completed through a cell phone contact.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend upon its sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from of each random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.3 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution have a smaller margin of error. Sampling error will be larger for findings based on subgroups of the overall sample.

### **Questions Asked**

Do you think the number of immigrants from countries in (Latin America) (Asia) who are allowed to come to live in the United States should be increased a lot, increased a little, reduced a lot, reduced a little, or kept about the same? (Latin America (LATIN AMERICA ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 571 VOTERS; ASIA ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 612 VOTERS)

As you may know, there are an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, including approximately two and a half million living in California.

Which comes closest to your view about what government policy should be toward illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 571 VOTERS)

1. The government should deport all illegal immigrants back to their home countries;
2. The government should allow illegal immigrants to remain in this country in order to work but only for a limited time;
3. The government should allow illegal immigrants to remain in this country and to become citizens but only if they meet certain requirements over a period of time.

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about this. (QUESTIONS READ IN RANDOM ORDER) (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 612 VOTERS)

Do you agree or disagree that illegal immigrants should be allowed to get California driver's licenses?

Do you agree or disagree that illegal immigrants should receive the same discount on tuition at California's public universities that the state's legal residents are eligible for?

Do you agree or disagree that illegal immigrants should have access to the same government health and financial assistance benefits that the state's legal residents are eligible for?