

Attitudes on immigration reform: an analysis of survey research

Research conducted by The Winston Group for:



Research design

National survey of 800 registered voters

- Includes oversample of Republicans for total of 400 interviews
- Republican oversample weighted down to balance overall sample
- Conducted via live-telephone interview, April 22-23, 2013

Overall environment

Few view immigration negatively.

% saying immigration is... a good thing for America basically neutral a bad thing for America

Overall

44

35

15

Republicans

31

36

24

Most - especially Republicans - view the current immigration system as working poorly.

% saying America's immigration system is working...

Very well

Fairly well

Fairly poorly

Very poorly

Overall

3

18

33

41

Republicans

2

12

35

47

As a result, there's an appetite for big changes in our current immigration system. Republicans and conservatives are most likely to call for “complete overhaul.”

Most want to see “a lot of changes” or a “complete overhaul” of our immigration system.

% saying America's immigration system needs...

No changes

Few changes

A lot of changes

A complete overhaul

Overall

2

27

34

34

Republicans

2

23

33

39

Conservatives are most likely to call for a “complete overhaul” of the immigration system.

41

Conservatives

32

Moderates

26

Liberals

% saying America’s immigration system needs “a complete overhaul”

Self-identified “Tea Party” voters (12% of sample) are more likely to call for complete overhaul.

46

Tea Party

32

Non-Tea Party

% saying America’s immigration system needs “a complete overhaul”

Initial reactions to the plan

“A bipartisan group of senators recently introduced legislation to reform the immigration system. The plan establishes border security measures focused on high-risk areas of the Southern border, requires illegal immigrants to pass multiple criminal background checks, pay fines, learn English and pay taxes before getting in line for citizenship, makes E-Verify mandatory for all employers, and creates a new work visa program that regulates immigration according to unemployment. Would you say you support or oppose this plan to reform the immigration system? (ROTATE) Would you say you strongly (SUPPORT/OPPOSE) or only somewhat (SUPPORT/OPPOSE)?”

Some 78% of Republicans support the plan as described, and nearly half (47%) *strongly* support it.

% who...	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Overall	43	32	8	7
Republicans	47	31	7	7

Conservatives are most likely to say they “strongly support” the plan as initially described.

50

Conservatives

42

Moderates

33

Liberals

% saying they “strongly support” the plan as described

Self-identified “Tea Party” voters are more likely to say they strongly support the plan as described.

54

Tea Party

41

Non-Tea Party

% saying they “strongly support” the plan as described

“A bipartisan group of senators recently introduced legislation to reform the immigration system. The plan has four main elements. I am going to read each of them to you, and for each one, I’d like you to tell me if you support or oppose of that part of the plan...”

The plan will strengthen border security by putting more resources on the border so that at least nine out of ten illegal crossers are apprehended, so that 100% of the border will be under surveillance, and so that we have a system in place to track immigrants who enter and exit the country.

Nearly three out of four Republicans (74%) *strongly* support this border security provision as described.

% who...	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Overall	59	20	7	9
Republicans	74	17	4	3

“A bipartisan group of senators recently introduced legislation to reform the immigration system. The plan has four main elements. I am going to read each of them to you, and for each one, I’d like you to tell me if you support or oppose of that part of the plan...”

The plan will require employers to use E-Verify to make sure that all employees are legal, and any companies that employ illegal immigrants would pay large fines.

The partisan gap shrinks on E-Verify, with 64% of voters and 71% of Republicans strongly supporting as described.

% who...	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Overall	64	20	6	8
Republicans	71	18	6	3

“A bipartisan group of senators recently introduced legislation to reform the immigration system. The plan has four main elements. I am going to read each of them to you, and for each one, I’d like you to tell me if you support or oppose of that part of the plan...”

The plan will require illegal immigrants in the U.S. to register for legal status, pay fines, learn English, pay taxes, and wait in the back of the line to apply for citizenship, until everyone who is currently in line to legally enter the U.S. gets in.

This description, focused largely on the hurdles one must overcome to apply for citizenship, is supported by Republicans.

% who...	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Overall	48	31	8	9
Republicans	58	27	4	6

“A bipartisan group of senators recently introduced legislation to reform the immigration system. The plan has four main elements. I am going to read each of them to you, and for each one, I’d like you to tell me if you support or oppose of that part of the plan...”

The plan will tie the amount of legal immigration to the state of the economy to attract more immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators, increasing the number of visas when employers cannot fill jobs and decreasing the number of visas when unemployment is high.

On this item regarding legal immigration and visas, Republican support dips lower than on the other elements.

% who...	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
Overall	29	36	13	14
Republicans	29	33	12	16

Among Republicans, the border security and E-Verify elements are most supported as described.

	% overall who support	% Republicans who support
“strengthen border security...”	80	90
“require employers to use E-verify...”	83	89
“wait in line for citizenship...”	80	85
“legal immigration [tied] to economy...”	65	62

Having heard it described...

Post-messaging: “Overall, thinking about the plan as a whole, made up of the four parts I just described, would you say you support or oppose this plan to reform the immigration system?”

Overall support goes from

74% to 83%.

Republican support goes from

78% to 87%.

“Do you think this proposal would help the economy, have no effect, or hurt the economy?”

% saying...	Help the economy	Have no effect	Hurt the economy
Overall	58	21	12
Republicans	61	20	11

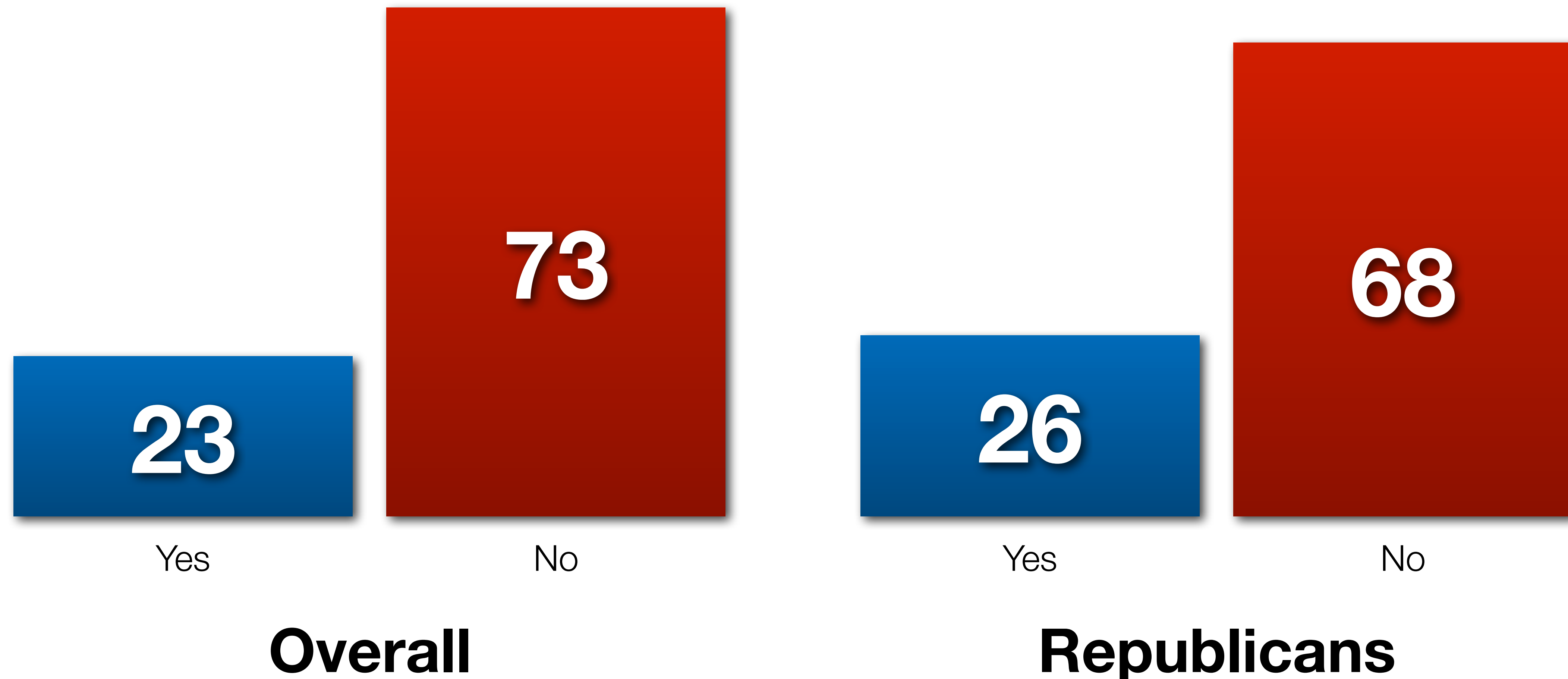
“Do you think this proposal would strengthen border security, weaken border security, or make no difference?”

% saying... Strengthen border security Have no effect Weaken border security

Overall **61** **32** **3**

Republicans **71** **23** **2**

Few, however, think this plan as described would “fix the problems in our immigration system once and for all.”



The debate on the right...

“Opponents of the bill say it is so liberal that President Obama supports it.”

“Supporters of the bill say the bill will generate billions in new economic growth.”

“Opponents of the bill say it is being written in secret and is being rushed through Congress so no one can read it.”

“Supporters of the bill say it is a strong start, supported by conservative leaders.”

“Proponents of the bill say our immigration system is broken, and the status quo of having 11 million undocumented people living under de facto amnesty will only continue if we do nothing to solve this problem.”

“Opponents of the bill say our immigration laws today are being ignored by the Obama administration. We should enforce the laws we have before talking about changing them and giving anyone amnesty.”

“Proponents of the bill say this bill will fix our broken system by securing our borders, improving interior enforcement, modernizing our legal immigration to create jobs, and dealing with our undocumented population in a tough but humane way that is fair to those trying to come here the right way, and is linked to achieving several border security triggers.”

“Opponents of the bill say this immigration bill fails to secure the border and immediately gives amnesty to 11 million illegal immigrants, including criminals. Once legal, these people will take jobs away from American citizens and will cost taxpayers trillions because of all the new welfare benefits we will pay to those given amnesty. Rewarding lawbreakers by putting them in line ahead of those trying to immigrate the legal way, is unfair, and will only encourage more illegal immigration.”

Post-messaging: “Now, having heard all of this, would you say you support or oppose this plan to reform the immigration system?”

**Overall support goes from
74% at first, stays at 74% by end.**

**Republican support goes from
78% at first, to 67% by end.**

Key takeaways...

**Voters - including Republicans -
are not anti-immigration, though
they acknowledge it can have
both positive and negative
effects.**

Frustration with the current system works in favor of those pursuing reform. Republicans in particular are fed up with the status quo.

The plan as described is viewed favorably by Republicans, though it is important for supporters to **prove that the promised positive outcomes are possible.**

**Opposition messages do divide
Republicans, but even after
hearing opposition arguments
that test quite strongly, support
for reform remains.**



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