



**Email this article**  
**Print this article**  
**Most popular pages**

**Click to send**  
**Choose File Print or Ctrl P or Apple P**  
**Today | This Week**

## Most in poll would let immigrants stay

*But weak border security, terrorists are major concerns*

**Susan Carroll**

The Arizona Republic  
Oct. 19, 2005 12:00 AM

Despite their belief that undocumented immigrants are an economic drain on the state, most Arizona voters do not want to force them to leave the United States if they are established in communities and have no criminal record, according to a poll commissioned by *The Arizona Republic*.

The statewide poll also indicated that nearly two-thirds of voters believe that the border remains far from secure, and 85 percent said the possibility that terrorists could enter the country if the borders are not secured is a major concern.

Consistent with these concerns, most of the 600 respondents want the border and immigration to be managed more rigorously by increasing the number of agents or military personnel policing the border, by cracking down on employers and by creating a federal guest-worker program that would allow some of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants to stay in the United States.

Measures for immigration reform with the greatest support, favored by 60 percent to 80 percent of the respondents, include:

- Making all employers verify the legal status of workers.
- Substantially increasing the U.S. Border Patrol's presence.
- Creating a federal guest-worker program that would permit foreigners to apply for temporary work visas.
- Allowing some undocumented immigrants to stay in the country if they hold jobs, have roots here and have no criminal records.

### **Negative impact**

Calls for stronger immigration enforcement, which cost American taxpayers at least \$1.4 billion last year alone, were offset by concern for undocumented immigrants with established lives in the United States.

"I understand the people's plight and wanting to make a better life for themselves," said poll respondent Fred Moore, a 68-year-old retired appraiser who lives in Phoenix. "But on the other hand, we don't have the resources to deal with the people coming here. We're not prepared to handle it."

More than half of respondents said undocumented immigrants are a burden on the state because they take jobs from U.S. citizens and depress wages. Nearly eight in 10 said they are a drain on the state, believing they require substantial social services, the poll found.

But only 28 percent of respondents had the stomach to send all undocumented immigrants back home. About one-fourth were seriously concerned about a possible spike in consumer prices and a worker shortage if all were forced to return home.

Many more voters worried about the suffering that undocumented immigrants might endure if deported. The possibility that families living in the United States for years who have few ties to their home countries would endure personal and economic hardship if deported was a "major concern" of half of the respondents.

"A lot of them have families here," said Joanna Castillo, a 33-year-old homemaker who was born in Texas and has friends who are undocumented immigrants. "What about the children? What are they going to do with them?"

"I'm against the illegal immigration, but I feel that they should be able to come and work, especially considering the economics of the way they live (in Mexico)," added Castillo, a Democrat.

## **Legal workers**

The poll indicated widespread support for some sort of temporary-worker program. Several such programs have been proposed by the Bush administration and members of Congress, including competing plans by Arizona Republican Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they would support a federal program for temporary foreign workers, with 63 percent of Republicans, 73 percent of Democrats and 69 percent of independents or members of other parties in favor.

When it comes to allowing undocumented immigrants to stay in the United States, the divide is wider, with 61 percent of Republicans in favor vs. 78 percent of Democrats.

Rosemarie Malroy, 65, said she is concerned that businesses, particularly farmers and growers like her brother-in-law, who owns fruit orchards in Oregon, will continue to struggle to find enough labor without some kind of legal foreign-worker program.

"He is having a hard time getting workers to pick his fruit, because he said Americans don't . . . want this kind of work," said Malroy, an artist and writer who lives in Fountain Hills. "This is an important thing; this is going to be all over the United States, not just for the farmers but for all businesses."

"I think there should be some program where they can have, if not a green card, a card that allows them to work for some time," said Malroy, a Republican.

But Andrew Ambos, a 49-year-old truck driver who lives in Kingman, said he just can't bring himself to support anything remotely resembling an amnesty because of the sheer number of people crossing the border. Ambos said the changes in the country's makeup are evident as far north as his hometown of Milwaukee.

"I have nothing against those people as far as their race. But God, they're flooding

into the country," said Ambos, a Democrat. "It's not just from Mexico; it's other countries as well. Now it's even a greater threat, what with terrorism the way it is now. It's not benign; it's a physical danger as well as an economic danger."

The situation along Arizona's border has been building to a crisis level since the late 1990s. In 2000, the number of arrests along the Southwestern border peaked at 1.6 million and then dropped sharply after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Since then, arrests have leveled off during the past few years at more than 1.1 million, with the majority recorded in Arizona.

## State of emergency

The sheer volume of illegal crossings and the increasingly brazen behavior of smugglers prompted Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano to recently declare a state of emergency along the state's porous border.

The public is aware of the country's vulnerability, according to the poll, with only 4 percent of respondents saying the government's attempts to secure the border are "very successful." Nearly one-third called the efforts "moderately" successful. The respondents, particularly Republicans, were optimistic that the government could get closer to its goal of securing the border, with 85 percent predicting it could be moderately or very successful in the future.

The two polar-opposite proposals for border reform, fencing the entire 1,951-mile international line and creating an "open border" with Mexico, garnered little support in the poll.

Only about a third of respondents very strongly or fairly strongly supported building a high-security fence along the border, regardless of the cost. Only 14 percent very strongly or fairly strongly liked the idea of opening the border with Mexico, making it the least-popular option.

There was no clear consensus on whether stopping illegal immigration should be a national priority, regardless of the cost. Forty-seven percent said it should be, even if very costly; 51 percent disagreed and said the goal should be to control it at a "reasonable cost."

There was lukewarm enthusiasm, however, for either cutting other government programs or raising taxes to spend more on border enforcement.

The most popular option was reducing spending on the war in Iraq, with 44 percent of respondents very strongly or fairly strongly in favor. One-third felt that way about eliminating recent tax cuts, and 23 percent felt similarly about reducing federal commitments to the reconstruction of areas damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The least popular proposals were cutting federal spending for health, education or other social services (18 percent) and raising taxes (17 percent).

Keith Shillito, a 36-year-old physician who lives in Parker, said people bent on complaining about the cost of illegal immigration are "not running out there to pick melons and do the labor that the undocumented immigrants do."

"I look at it from a humanitarian perspective, and that is that they're benefiting us and we don't really give them much in return," said Shillito, a Democrat. "Illegal immigration is something that, to some extent, we have to accept. It's not like it's going away."

**Jon Kamman contributed to this article.**

**Email this article**  
**Print this article**  
**Most popular pages**

**Click to send**  
**Choose File Print or Ctrl P or Apple P**  
**Today | This Week**