



Support for Immigration Reform Correlated with Perception of Immigrants' Economic Impact

Support for eVerify Drops When Costs
Considered

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Support for eVerify Drops When Costs Considered

Public Supports Legal Residency and Path to Citizenship for Unauthorized Immigrants; Muted Support To Ease Path for Legal Immigration

This report details Americans' perceptions of immigration's economic impact and their support for reform, based on findings from the latest national Reason-Rupe poll, which interviewed 1002 adults on landline and mobile phones February 21-25, 2013.

A majority supports legal residency and path to citizenship for the 11 million unauthorized immigrants currently residing in the United States. However, Americans are less supportive of making it easier for future immigrants to enter the country legally. Support for reform is correlated with perception of immigrants' economic impact, education, and youth.

Fully 70 percent of Americans think unauthorized immigrants currently living in the United States should be allowed to stay. Moreover, a majority (55 percent) believes unauthorized immigrants should be eventually allowed to apply for citizenship if they meet certain requirements.

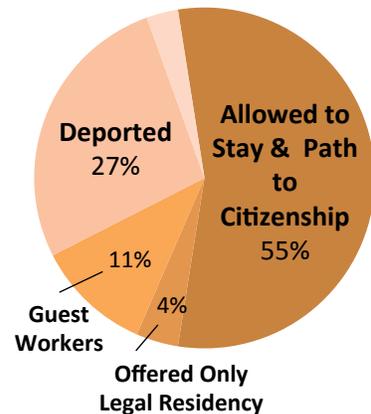
There is less enthusiastic support for raising visa caps for high-skilled (40 percent) and low-skilled workers (40 percent). Nevertheless, few want to decrease legal immigration into the country. Interestingly, both high-skilled and low-skilled visas enjoy similar levels of support.

Significant partisan differences emerge regarding views of immigration's impact on the economy and support for legal residency and path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants. However, partisan differences are attenuated when controlling for differences in economic assumptions, such as immigrants effect on the economy and jobs. Interestingly, there is little partisan disagreement when it comes to easing the path for new high- and low-skilled workers seeking visas.

As a benefits-only proposal, there is broad bipartisan support (79 percent) for a federal government database like eVerify that verifies the legal immigration status of any job applicant an employer considers hiring. However, support plummets when costs to businesses are considered.

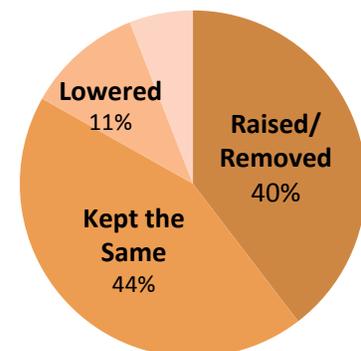
Majority Favor Residency and Path to Citizenship

Unauthorized immigrants should be...

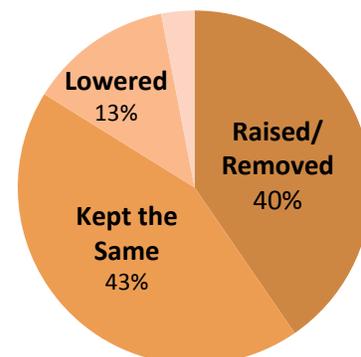


Public Divided Over Easing Path for Future Immigrants

High-skilled visa caps should be...



Low-skilled visa caps should be...



REASON-RUPE POLL February 21-25 2013
Lightest shade represents "don't knows"

Public Support for eVerify Drops Significantly When Costs Considered

Few Americans see much reason to oppose eVerify when it is first presented to them as a federal government database that employers use to ensure they hire workers eligible to work in the US. However, once costs to small businesses are introduced, support for eVerify plummets, even among those with the greatest anxiety over immigration.

Fully 79 percent of Americans, including majorities of all political groups, support requiring employers to check with a federal government database that verifies the legal immigration status of any job applicant they consider hiring. They say this even when they are aware that both native-born and foreign-born applicants would be in the database. While 73 percent of Democrats favor eVerify, their opposition is double that of Republicans (22 percent to 10 percent).

When respondents learn their own name would be kept in the database, opposition rises from 17 percent to 28 percent, but support still hovers around two-thirds. However, 58 percent of respondents would oppose eVerify if business owners were required to pay \$150 for every worker they are considering hiring.¹ Republicans are especially sensitive to this cost with opposition jumping 53 points from 10 percent to 63 percent. Democratic and Independent opposition also rises from roughly 18 percent to 57 percent.

Even a majority of those who fear immigration's impact would oppose eVerify if its costs fell upon employers and small business owners. In fact, among the 27 percent of Americans who favor deportation of all unauthorized immigrants, support for eVerify drops from 88 percent to 33 percent once these costs are considered. This means even those less enthusiastic about immigration could be persuaded to oppose eVerify once they learn about the costs. It also suggests that one need not be convinced immigrants benefit the economy and do not steal jobs to oppose eVerify.

Among the 8 in 10 Americans who initially supported eVerify, half changed their minds upon learning that eVerify could cost employers \$150 per person. These Americans tend to be more Republican, older, church-going protestants, and more likely to support the tea party movement.

As a benefits-only proposition, Americans support eVerify as a method to check the legal status of workers in the US. However, they do not support shifting the financial burden of border enforcement onto the shoulders of businesses.

Support for eVerify Drops When Costs Considered

Among those who think immigration...

	<i>All</i>	Helps Grow Economy	Hurts Economy
Favor	79%	74%	89%
Oppose	17%	21%	10%
<i>...if own name included in database</i>			
Favor	65%	67%	68%
Oppose	28%	24%	27%
<i>...if costs businesses \$150 per job applicant</i>			
Favor	37%	37%	43%
Oppose	58%	59%	54%

REASON-RUPE POLL February 21-25 2013

Support for Reform

Fifty-five percent of Americans support offering legal residency and an eventual path to citizenship to unauthorized immigrants currently living in the United States if they meet certain requirements. Far fewer support deportation (27 percent) while 11 percent support allowing unauthorized immigrants to stay temporarily as guest workers, or stay permanently but without a path to citizenship (4 percent).

Although a majority supports reform for unauthorized immigrants, there is less enthusiastic support for making it easier for future immigrants to come into the country legally. Forty percent of Americans favor raising the number of visas given to high-skilled and low-skilled workers, while about 43 percent prefer to maintain the current level. Roughly 12 percent favor reducing the visa cap.

Even Americans who support legal residency for unauthorized workers are divided over whether to maintain (43 percent) or raise (45 percent) the number of visas.

Americans who favor deporting undocumented workers are also cooler toward easing the legal pathway for future immigrants. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, even among these, 28 percent favor increasing the number of low-skilled visas, while fully 42 percent would keep it the same, and about a quarter would reduce the number of visas. But the fact that 26 percent of Americans who favor deportation also support tightening legal immigration as well suggests these individuals are less favorable toward immigration in general, not simply opposed to rule-breaking. Indeed, among those who favor deportation, 67 percent feel immigrants harm the economy and 82 percent think immigrants take jobs from Americans. In sum, opposition to rule-breaking may not be the driving force behind support for deportation, but rather other concerns instead, such as anxiety over immigration's impact or fear of newcomers.

Should unauthorized immigrants currently living in the US be...

	Allowed to Stay/Path to Citizenship	Deported
All	55%	27%
Republican	41%	35%
Democrat	66%	19%
Independent	56%	27%
18-29	61%	21%
30-44	54%	26%
45-54	48%	39%
55+	55%	25%
Caucasian	51%	32%
African-American	63%	24%
Latino	72%	13%
High School	48%	34%
Some College	54%	26%
College	62%	20%
Post-Grad	65%	14%
Northeast	50%	22%
Midwest	53%	35%
South	50%	31%
West	67%	16%
Rural	49%	34%
Suburban	55%	28%
Urban	64%	18%

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Should the cap on low-skilled visas be raised, kept the same, or lowered?

Among those who say unauthorized immigrants should be granted residency and path to citizenship or deported...

	Allowed to Stay/Path to Citizenship	Deported
All	55%	27%
Raised/Removed	45%	28%
Kept the same	44%	42%
Lowered	8%	26%

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Respondents who selected permanent (4%) or temporary (11%) residency were excluded from tables

Perceptions of Immigration’s Economic Benefits Correlate with Support for Reform

Americans’ underlying assumptions about how immigration impacts the economy significantly correlate with their attitudes toward reform. Americans who believe immigrants grow the economy and don’t “take jobs away” are also more likely to favor reforms easing legal entry for future immigrants and offering residency and citizenship opportunities to unauthorized immigrants.

From this data alone, it is unclear whether fear of newcomers or some other concern actually shapes assumptions of immigration’s economic impact and thus policy preferences, or if economic assumptions drive attitudes toward immigrants, or both. Instead these data detail the correlation, not causal connection, between economic assumptions and policy preferences.

Currently, Americans are evenly divided over whether immigration grows (40 percent) or hurts (40 percent) the economy; few (15 percent) believe it has no impact. A majority (52 percent) worries immigrants take jobs away from native-born Americans, 42 percent do not share this concern.

Those Who Think Immigration Helps Economy Are More Open to Reform

Among those who think immigration...

	Grows Economy	Hurts Economy	Doesn't Take Jobs Away	Take Jobs Away
All Respondents	40%	40%	42%	55%
<i>Unauthorized Immigrants should be...</i>				
Allowed to Stay & Path To Citizenship	73%	34%	75%	40%
Allowed to Stay & No Path To Citizenship	4%	4%	4%	4%
Allowed to Stay Temporarily	8%	15%	8%	13%
Deported to Home Country	11%	45%	9%	40%
<i>High Skilled Visa Caps should be...</i>				
Raised/Removed	52%	29%	48%	33%
Kept the Same	38%	49%	38%	48%
Lowered	5%	16%	7%	13%
<i>Low Skilled Visa Caps should be...</i>				
Raised/Removed	52%	32%	51%	31%
Kept the Same	37%	44%	39%	47%
Lowered	8%	20%	6%	18%

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Perception of Economic Benefits

Among Americans who believe immigrants help grow the economy, nearly three quarters (73 percent) think unauthorized immigrants should be allowed to stay and eventually apply for citizenship. Only 11 percent favor deportation of undocumented migrants. A

majority (52 percent) also favor raising or removing the visa cap for high-skilled and low-skilled workers, easing the path for future legal migration to the United States.

Those who perceive economic benefits from immigration also feel less angst regarding immigrants taking away jobs from the native-born. Among this group, three-quarters (75 percent) do not believe immigrants take jobs away from Americans, only 22 percent believe they do.

Perception of Economic Costs

In stark contrast, Americans who feel immigrants harm the economy are more likely to support deportation of unauthorized immigrants and oppose easing the path for legal immigration. Among this group, a plurality (45 percent) says unauthorized immigrants should be deported, while 34 percent say they should be allowed to stay and eventually apply for citizenship. These Americans are also 20 points less likely to favor raising the visa cap for high-skilled and low-skilled workers with only about 30 percent in support. Although significantly less likely to favor raising visa caps, a third is still a sizable share among those who say immigrants harm the economy. This demonstrates that other considerations in addition to economic assumptions inform policy preferences.

Immigration angst manifests primarily among those who fear immigrants both take jobs and harm the economy; among these, nearly half favor deportation for all 11 million unauthorized immigrants. However, among Americans who are worried about only immigrants' impact on the economy or jobs, but not both, 61 percent favor legal residency and a path to citizenship.

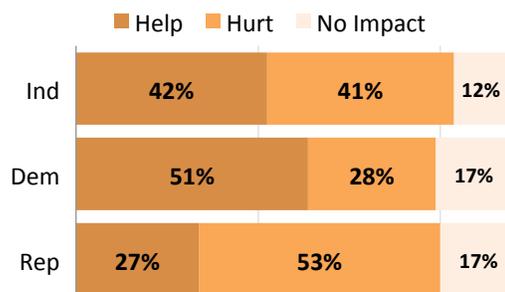
Although immigration angst is highly correlated with policy preferences, it is not necessarily the driving force or the deciding factor. Even among those who favor legal residency and path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants, a quarter are concerned immigrants may harm the economy and 40 percent believe they take away jobs.

Democrats Are More Supportive of Easing Path for Unauthorized Immigrants

Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say immigration hurts the economy and far less likely to support legal residency and path to citizenship. A majority (53 percent) of Republicans and 42 percent of Independents say immigration hurts the economy compared to 28 percent of Democrats. Likewise, 67 percent of Republicans and 56 percent of Independents say immigrants take jobs from native-born Americans, compared to 42 percent of Democrats.

Democrats Believe Immigration Grows the Economy, Republicans Disagree

Does immigration help grow the US economy, hurt the US economy, or not make much impact?



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Not surprisingly, far more Democrats favor legal residency and path to citizenship (66 percent) for unauthorized immigrants than Republicans (41 percent). Independents are evenly divided over whether immigration grows the economy, but side with the Democrats when it comes to policy for unauthorized immigrants (55 percent).

Democrats and Republicans Are Equally Supportive of Maintaining the Status Quo for High-Skilled and Low-Skilled Visas Annually Distributed

Interestingly Democrats are actually as likely as Republicans (both roughly 40 percent) to favor raising the visa cap for either high-skilled or low-skilled workers. This is surprising since those more favorable toward immigration tend to support raising the visa caps. Yet Democrats, who are more favorable to immigration, are no more likely than Republicans, who are less favorable toward immigration, to ease the path for future migrants. Republicans who believe immigrants strengthen the economy are actually more willing than like-minded Democrats to raise the cap on high-skilled visas (66 percent to 55 percent). Roughly half of both groups favor raising the cap for low-skilled visas.

Support for Reform Depends More on View of Immigration's Economic Impact than Partisanship

Among those who think immigration....

	Helps Economy		Hurts Economy	
	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep
<i>High Skilled Visas</i>				
Raised/Removed	50%	66%	31%	31%
Kept Same	40%	28%	51%	47%
Lowered	5%	4%	14%	15%
<i>Low Skilled Visas</i>				
Raised/Removed	54%	50%	33%	36%
Kept Same	39%	31%	43%	46%
Lowered	4%	18%	20%	15%
<i>Unauthorized Immigrants</i>				
Residency & Path To Citizenship	79%	62%	42%	31%
Residency Only	4%	3%	4%	3%
Temporary Residency	8%	10%	10%	21%
Deported	7%	18%	44%	42%

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After controlling for perceptions of immigration's economic impact, partisanship's influence on policy preferences diminishes substantially. If partisans assume immigrants strengthen the economy, strong majorities of both Republicans and Democrats support legal residency and a path to citizenship for unauthorized workers. In contrast, equal numbers (and pluralities) of Republicans and Democrats favor deportation if they say immigrants harm the economy.

Disagreement over how to address the 11 million unauthorized immigrants currently in this country may depend more on one's assumptions about immigrants' economic impact than on one's partisanship. At the same time this does not exclude other explanations of policy preferences, for instance a fear of newcomers may be correlated both with economic assumptions and opposition to reform. Nevertheless, policy advocates would be wise to understand if and why Republicans share different economic assumptions than Democrats. For instance, it may be self-selection into either party, or Americans receiving different rhetorical cues from their respective political elites.

The Young and More Educated Perceive Immigration Benefits

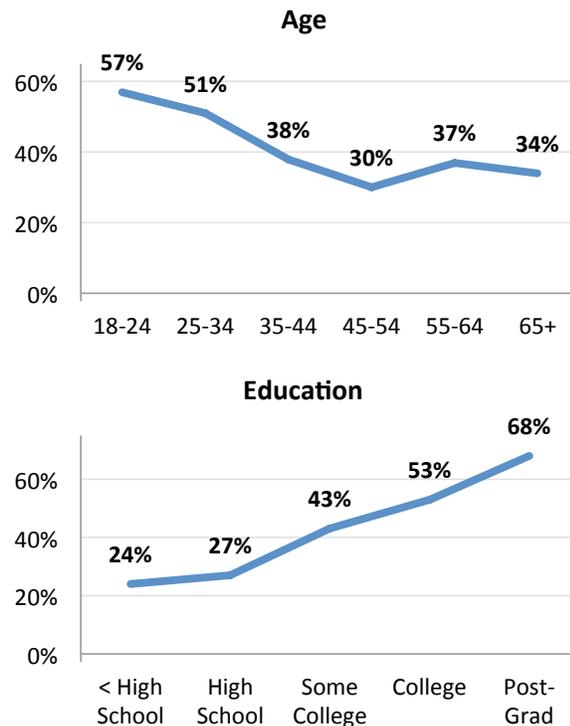
More education increases one's belief in the economic benefits of immigration, but age is negatively correlated. A majority of college graduates (53 percent) and those with post graduate degrees (68 percent) share optimism of immigration's economic benefits, but a little more than a quarter of those with high school diplomas share this view. Those with postgraduate degrees are 17 points more likely to favor a path to citizenship than high school graduates. Majorities of millennials believe immigrants grow the economy, but only about 35 percent of those aged 35 and older agree. Less surprisingly, millennials are more likely to favor residency and path to citizenship than those over thirty (60 percent to 53 percent).

White Americans are more skeptical of the economic benefits of immigration. Forty-six percent of Caucasians think immigrants hurt the economy and 60 percent say immigration takes jobs away from native-born Americans. Latinos disagree: 56 percent say immigration helps the economy and 59 percent say immigrants do not take away jobs. African-Americans are in the middle: a plurality (47 percent) say immigrants bolster the economy but 52 percent say they also take jobs away from native-born Americans.

There are also regional disparities over whether immigrants strengthen the economy. Americans in the Northeast and West are far less concerned about the effects of immigration than are Midwesterners and Southerners. Pluralities in the Northeast (48 percent) and West (43 percent) say immigrants bolster the economy and are evenly divided over whether immigrants take away jobs. However 57 percent of Midwesterners and 60 percent of Southerners say immigrants take away jobs. A plurality of those in the Midwest (45 percent) worry immigrants harm the economy, while the South is evenly divided.

The Young and Educated Share Belief in the Economic Benefits of Immigration

Immigration Grows the Economy...



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Discussion

A majority of Americans support offering legal residency and a path to citizenship to unauthorized immigrants currently living in the country who also meet particular requirements. While Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans to support this kind of reform, Americans' underlying assumptions of immigration's economic impact are a stronger predictor of their policy preferences than is their partisanship. When taking into account whether Americans think immigrants strengthen the economy or take their jobs, the effect of political affiliation is significantly diminished.

The strong correlation identified in the report between underlying economic assumptions and policy preferences may not be causal, but confounded. For instance, fear of newcomers may cause one to take on assumptions about immigrants' economic impact that justify initial predispositions. If so, then economic assumptions may have little to do with determining support for reform. However, economic assumptions about immigrants may also exert an independent effect on policy preferences in addition to other concerns. For this reason, it may be worthwhile for policy advocates to speak directly to Americans' economic assumptions. They should speak to how immigration affects jobs, wealth creation, economic growth, global competitiveness, and societal prosperity to move the dial toward reform.

Democrats are more favorable toward offering undocumented workers' residency than are Republicans, but neither group reaches a majority in support of more open policies toward future immigrants. Although Americans want to offer legal residency to those already in the country illegally, they are not willing to make substantive changes to the immigration process which would reduce future incidence of illegal immigration. Reform advocates may want to engage this discussion further.

Other reforms garnering majority support include eVerify, a federal government database to verify the immigration status of job applicants. However, support drops when the likely costs of the program to businesses are also considered. Americans do not support shifting the financial costs of border enforcement to businesses. Consequently, policy advocates should address both the costs and benefits of proposed reforms to adequately gauge public support.

Methodology

The Reason-Rupe January 2013 Poll interviewed 1002 adults on both mobile (502) and landline (500) phones, including 253 respondents without landlines from February 21-25, 2013. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percent. The margin of error increases for open-ended questions asked of subsets of the survey sample. Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) conducted the survey. Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source LLC. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. When feasible, answer choices within questions were rotated. For detailed methodological information, please visit <http://reason.com/reason-rupe-poll-methodology>.

The poll questionnaire, crosstabs, and analysis can be found at reason.com/poll.

Question Wording

Q24 In your view, does immigration help grow the U.S. economy, hurt the U.S. economy, or not make much impact on the U.S. economy?

Q25 And, in your view...does increasing the number of immigrants in the U.S. take jobs away from native-born Americans, or not?

Q26 In your view, do immigrants come to the United States primarily to find jobs and improve their lives or primarily to try to obtain government services and welfare benefits?

Q27 Do you favor or oppose requiring employers to check with a federal government database that verifies the LEGAL immigration status of any job applicant they are considering hiring, including both native-born and foreign-born applicants?

Q28 Would you favor or oppose this verification requirement if your name has to be kept in the federal database?

Q29 Would you favor or oppose this requirement if business owners have to pay \$150 to verify the legal status of every worker they are considering hiring?

Q30 Currently, the federal government limits the number of visas available for highly-skilled workers to 85,000 per year, which is less than the number American companies request. Do you think this cap on visas for highly-skilled workers, like engineers and doctors, should be raised, lowered, kept the same, or removed?

Q31 The U.S. government also caps the number of temporary work visas given to low-skilled workers at 66,000 per year, which is less than what American companies request. Do you think this cap on visas for low-skilled workers who work in landscaping, construction, and other fields, should be raised, lowered, kept the same, or removed?

Q32 Which comes closest to your view about unauthorized immigrants who are currently living in the United States? They should be allowed to stay in the U.S. and eventually be allowed to apply for citizenship if they meet certain requirements, [OR] They should be allowed to stay in the U.S., but not be allowed to apply for citizenship, [OR] They should be allowed to stay in the U.S. temporarily as guest workers, and then be sent back to their home countries, [OR] They should be deported back to their home countries?

¹ Several sources estimate eVerify's costs of verifying the legal status of a prospective employee at about \$150 per employee. Please see, Jason Arveio, "'Free' E-Verify May Cost Small Business \$2.6 Billion: Insight," *Bloomberg Government*, January 27, 2011, at <http://www.globalimmigrationcounsel.com/uploads/file/bloomberg.pdf>; Alex Nowrasteh, "The Economic Case Against Arizona's Immigration Laws," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 709 September 25, 2012, at www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/PA709.pdf. Philip E. Wolgin, "Seen and (Mostly Unseen): The True Costs of E-Verify." *Center for American Progress*, at http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/06/pdf/e_verify.pdf; Adam Smith, "Farmers must comply with e-Verify by April 1," *News Courier* March 30 2012, at <http://enewscourier.com/local/x1940323112/Farmers-must-comply-with-E-Verify-by-April-1>.