

Americans Prefer Illegal Immigrants Head Home Results of a National Survey

By Steven A. Camarota

A new poll using neutral language — and avoiding the false choice of conditional legalization vs. mass deportations — finds that most Americans want illegal immigrants to return to their home countries, rather than be given legal status. The findings also show a very large gap in intensity, with those who want illegal immigrants to head home feeling much stronger about that option than those who would like to see illegal immigrants receive legal status.

- Of likely voters, 52 percent responded that they preferred to see illegal immigrants in the United States go back to their home countries, compared to just 33 percent who would like them to be given legal status.
- There is an enormous gap in intensity between the two views on immigration. Of those who want illegal immigrants to head home, 73 percent indicated that they felt “very strongly” about that view, while just 35 percent of those who want illegal immigrants to get legal status said they felt very strongly about this view.
- One reason the public may prefer that illegals head home is a strong belief that efforts to enforce immigration laws have been inadequate — 64 percent said that enforcement of immigration laws has been “too little”, while just 10 percent said that it had been too much, and 15 percent said it was “just right”.
- When asked why there is a large illegal population in the country, voters overwhelming (71 percent) thought it was because we had not made a real effort to enforce our immigration laws. Only 18 percent said it was because we were not letting in enough immigrants legally.
- Another reason for skepticism about legalization is that most voters (69 percent) agreed with the statement that “giving legal status to illegal immigrants does not solve the problem because rewarding law breaking will only encourage more illegal immigration.” Just 26 percent disagreed.
- When asked if they had confidence that immigration laws would be enforced in the event of a legalization, just 27 percent expressed confidence that there would be enforcement, while 70 percent indicated that they were not confident immigration law would be enforced.
- Enforcement remains politically very popular. Of likely voters, 53 percent indicated that they would be more likely to support a political party that supports enforcing immigration laws vs. only 32 percent who said they would be more likely to support a party that supports legalization.

The poll was conducted by Pulse Opinion Research and is a national survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted January 23-24, 2013. The margin of error for questions is +/-3%. Question wording is provided in the table.

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Table 1. National Survey of 1,000 Likely Voters, Conducted January 23-24, 2013, by Pulse Opinion Research (Margin of error +/- 3%)

	All Likely Voters	Race			Party			Political Ideology		
		White	Black	Other	Republican	Democrat	Other	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
1) Has the government's effort to enforce immigration laws in the United States been too much, too little, or just right?	10% 64% 15% 12%	8% 63% 15% 14%	10% 67% 19% 4%	16% 62% 14% 8%	4% 79% 6% 11%	14% 49% 23% 14%	10% 66% 15% 9%	8% 79% 7% 7%	8% 66% 13% 13%	13% 39% 31% 17%
2) Would you prefer to see illegal immigrants in the United States go back to their home countries or be given legal status?	52% 33% 15%	54% 31% 14%	55% 28% 17%	36% 46% 18%	71% 14% 16%	38% 48% 15%	50% 35% 16%	68% 19% 13%	50% 32% 18%	28% 55% 17%
3a) How strongly do you feel that illegal immigrants in the United States should go back to their home countries? (Asked only of those who indicated that illegals should go home in question 2.)	73% 22% 3% 2% 0%	67% 26% 4% 2% 1%	94% 2% 4% 0% 0%	85% 15% 0% 0% 0%	69% 25% 2% 2% 1%	73% 20% 5% 3% 0%	78% 18% 4% 0% 0%	78% 18% 2% 2% 0%	67% 25% 7% 0% 0%	64% 27% 3% 5% 1%
3b) How strongly do you feel that illegal immigrants in the United States should be given legal status? (Asked only of those who indicated that illegals should be given legal status in question 2.)	35% 47% 12% 3% 3%	35% 50% 9% 4% 2%	12% 60% 18% 1% 9%	50% 31% 17% 0% 2%	27% 39% 22% 12% 1%	41% 48% 8% 1% 2%	29% 48% 15% 2% 5%	21% 38% 28% 11% 3%	38% 41% 14% 0% 7%	41% 55% 3% 0% 1%
4) Would you be more likely to vote for a political party that supports enforcing immigration laws or a political party that supports legalizing illegal immigrants?	53% 32% 15%	56% 32% 13%	52% 25% 22%	39% 42% 19%	72% 12% 16%	37% 48% 14%	52% 33% 14%	73% 14% 13%	50% 30% 21%	26% 63% 11%
5) If the government did give legal status to illegal immigrants in the country and promised immigration laws would be enforced, how confident are you that laws would be enforced?	6% 21% 35% 3%	4% 23% 36% 3%	17% 17% 26% 2%	11% 19% 34% 2%	2% 9% 32% 1%	12% 30% 40% 3%	3% 24% 30% 4%	3% 13% 30% 1%	5% 19% 39% 4%	14% 37% 36% 3%
6) Which of the following best reflects your views of low-wage jobs that require relatively little education — America needs large numbers of immigrants to fill these jobs because there are not enough Americans willing to do them OR there are plenty of Americans to do such jobs, if employers can't find workers, they should pay more and treat workers better?	23% 67% 10%	21% 71% 8%	11% 65% 24%	39% 53% 8%	15% 71% 14%	31% 61% 8%	20% 71% 9%	15% 74% 11%	24% 68% 9%	32% 58% 10%
7) Some politicians are pushing for legislation that would give the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the country citizenship. Is the main reason they are pushing for this legislation because they are pandering to Hispanics to get votes OR because they are generally concerned about illegal immigrants?	62% 25% 14%	61% 24% 14%	71% 15% 14%	56% 35% 10%	82% 8% 10%	47% 40% 14%	59% 23% 17%	78% 13% 9%	61% 24% 15%	38% 43% 18%
8) Do you agree or disagree that giving legal status to illegal immigrants does not solve the problem because rewarding law breaking will only encourage more illegal immigration in the future?	49% 20% 17% 9% 5%	48% 17% 20% 10% 5%	60% 23% 10% 3% 4%	42% 27% 10% 13% 7%	68% 15% 6% 6% 4%	34% 22% 25% 12% 7%	47% 21% 18% 10% 4%	68% 18% 6% 5% 3%	48% 19% 19% 8% 7%	22% 23% 32% 16% 7%
9) Do we have so many illegal immigrants in the United States because we have not made a real effort to enforce our immigration laws or because we have not allowed enough legal immigrants into the country, so they have to come illegally?	71% 18% 11%	72% 17% 11%	78% 11% 11%	62% 26% 12%	89% 6% 5%	60% 27% 14%	67% 18% 14%	86% 10% 4%	71% 16% 13%	49% 31% 20%

Table 2. Survey Demographics

		Total Likely Voters
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
Age	18-29	21%
	30-39	16%
	40-49	20%
	50-64	28%
	65+	15%
Race	White	72%
	Black	13%
	Other	15%
Party	Republican	32%
	Democrat	39%
	Other	30%