

# THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY  
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS  
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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### **GROWING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VOTERS AND NON-VOTERS ABOUT PERCEIVED IMPACT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARE HAVING ON STATE AND WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE ISSUED DRIVER'S LICENSES. BROAD-BASED SUPPORT FOR GUEST WORKER PROGRAM.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

While Californians of all stripes express considerable concern about illegal immigration, there are growing differences between voters and non-voters on the perceived impact that illegal immigrants are having on the state overall and on the issue of whether they should be permitted to obtain driver's licenses.

On the other hand, there does appear to be public consensus on two other immigration-related issues. For example, seven in ten Californians (70%) think that illegal immigrants are generally doing jobs that other residents don't want, while just 22% see them as taking jobs away. In addition, a 65% majority of the public favors the idea of creating worker programs for illegal immigrants that would legalize their status, while only 27% are opposed.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* completed in late February, which updated a number of opinion measures on matters relating to illegal immigration.

#### **Illegal immigration continues to generate a high degree of concern**

Nearly three out of four Californians (73%) are concerned to some degree about the issue of illegal immigration, with 43% being extremely concerned. Even so, compared to prior years, concerns about the issue have declined somewhat from *Field Poll* surveys conducted over the past ten years.

Although large majorities of residents across all subgroups of the population say they are either extremely or somewhat concerned about illegal immigration, the intensity of concern varies significantly by party, with Republicans twice as likely as Democrats to say they're extremely concerned about the issue.

**Table 1**  
**Concern about the issue of illegal immigration**

	<b><u>Extremely concerned</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat concerned</u></b>	<b><u>Not concerned</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<u>All adults</u>				
<b>February 2006</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>
2005	49%	32	18	1
2002	49%	29	21	1
1997	58%	26	16	*
1996	53%	32	12	3
<u>Voter registration status</u>				
Not registered	46%	25	26	3
Registered voters	<u>41%</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>1</u>
Democrats	27%	35	38	**
Republicans	58%	32	10	**
Non-partisans/others*	43%	31	25	1
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White (non-Hispanic)	42%	34	23	1
Latino	49%	25	26	**
Others*	35%	29	36	**

\* Small sample base.

\*\* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

Note: 2002 and 2005 surveys conducted among registered voters only.

### **More divided view of impact that illegal immigrants are having on the state**

One significant trend in public thinking over the past twenty-four years is a shift in how Californians view the impact that illegal immigrants are having on the state overall.

Between 1982 and 1994 *The Field Poll* found a slight decline in the large majority of the state's residents who viewed illegal immigrants as having a negative effect on the state. For example, in 1982, 75% felt illegal immigrants had an unfavorable impact on the state, while just 19% thought their overall impact was favorable. This narrowed a bit to a 69% to 23% margin in 1987 and to a 67% to 26% margin in 1994. However, in the current survey, the proportions of residents who feel illegal immigrants are having an unfavorable impact has declined to 45%, while about as many (47%) now feel they are having a favorable impact.

The results show that there are growing differences between the views of voters and non-voters on this matter. Voters, by a 57% to 36% margin, continue to see illegal immigrants as having a more unfavorable than favorable impact on the state. By contrast, those not registered to vote, about half of whom are non-citizens, hold a much more positive view, and, by a 64% to 26% margin, see illegal immigrants as having a generally favorable impact on the state.

There are also big differences among subgroups of the registered voter population. Registered Republicans are most one-sided in their belief that the effects illegal immigrants are having on the state are unfavorable, with 71% holding to this view. On the other hand, registered Democrats are about evenly split on the matter.

Regardless of their voting status, white non-Hispanics and Latinos also hold very different views on this subject. The former group, by a 58% to 33% margin, sees the overall impact of illegal immigrants in an unfavorable light. By contrast, three-fourths (75%) of Latinos believe that illegal immigrants have a generally positive effect on the state.

<b>Table 2</b>			
<b>Effect of illegal immigrants on the state overall (among California adults)</b>			
	<b><u>Favorable</u></b>	<b><u>Unfavorable</u></b>	<b><u>No effect/ No opinion</u></b>
<u>All adults</u>			
<b>2006</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>8</b>
1994	26%	67	7
1987	23%	69	8
1982	19%	75	6
<u>Voter registration status</u>			
Not registered to vote	64%	26	10
Registered voters	<u>36%</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>7</u>
Democrats	45%	48	7
Republicans	24%	71	5
Non-partisans/others*	37%	53	10
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White (non-Hispanic)	33%	58	9
Latino	75%	19	6
Others*	43%	48	9

\* Small sample base.

**Declining concerns about impact illegal immigrants are having on jobs**

One of the main concerns about illegal immigration is the extent to which those who are here illegally are perceived as taking jobs away from other legal residents. In the early 1980s, in the midst of a prolonged recession, a majority of the state’s residents (52%) felt that illegal immigrants were taking jobs away from other Californians, while 38% thought they were mainly doing jobs that other residents didn’t want. Opinions on this question changed in a fairly dramatic way the next time *The Field Poll* examined the issue in 1987. At that time, a greater than two to one majority (65% to 30%) maintained that illegal immigrants were mainly doing jobs that other Californians did not want.

The current survey, conducted at a time when the state’s unemployment rate is less than 5%, shows that 70% of residents believe illegal immigrants are mainly doing jobs other residents don’t want, while just 22% feel they are taking jobs away from other Californians.

The view that illegal immigrants are mainly doing jobs that others don’t want is shared by majorities across all major sub-groups – including those registered to vote and those who are not, as well as across all party and ethnic sub-groups.

**Table 3**  
**Are illegal immigrants taking jobs away from Californians or**  
**mostly doing jobs that other Californians don’t want?**

	<b><u>Doing jobs others don’t want</u></b>	<b><u>Taking jobs away</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b><u>All adults</u></b>			
<b>2006</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>
1994	58%	34	8
1987	65%	30	5
1982	38%	52	10
<b><u>Voter registration status</u></b>			
Not registered to vote	78%	18	4
Registered voters	<u>65%</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>10</u>
Democrats	69%	20	11
Republicans	61%	29	10
Non-partisans/others*	61%	27	12
<b><u>Race/ethnicity</u></b>			
White (non-Hispanic)	65%	25	10
Latino	85%	9	6
Others*	61%	32	7

\* Small sample base.

**Temporary worker program supported**

One proposal that has been suggested by President George W. Bush and other politicians is to reform immigration laws by creating a temporary worker program for illegal immigrants that would legalize their status.

Californians favor this proposal by a wide margin, 65% to 27%. While opinions vary somewhat among the state’s sub-groups, majorities or pluralities in each case are in favor of the proposal.

**Table 4**  
**Create temporary worker programs for illegal immigrants**  
**that would legalize their status and allow future immigrants**  
**to work in the U.S.**

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>All adults</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>Voter registration status</u>			
Not registered to vote	73%	20	7
Registered voters	<u>60%</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>8</u>
Democrats	67%	28	5
Republicans	49%	40	11
Non-partisans/others*	62%	26	12
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White (non-Hispanic)	59%	30	11
Latino	81%	15	4
Others*	57%	37	6

\* Small sample base.

**Growing differences between voters and non-voter about allowing drivers license for illegal immigrants**

The current poll finds some change in public attitudes toward the idea of allowing illegal or undocumented workers to obtain a driver’s license in California. Currently, 52% of adults statewide oppose the idea, while 44% are in favor. This compares to a larger 62% to 35% margin of opposition one year ago.

Most of the recent shift in public opinion has occurred among those not registered to vote, who now favor allowing illegals to obtain a driver’s license 61% to 35%. Among the state’s registered voters, 62% remain opposed to the idea, while just 33% are in favor.

Registered Republicans are strongly opposed to the idea of allowing illegal immigrants to have a driver’s license, 80% to 17%, while registered Democrats are evenly split.

White non-Hispanics are also in strong opposition, 66% to 28%, while among Latinos, the reverse is true, with 74% in favor and 23% opposed.

**Table 5**  
**Opinions about allowing illegal or undocumented workers**  
**to obtain a driver's license in California**

	<u>February 2006</u>		<u>March 2005</u>	
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>
<b>All adults</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>62</b>
<u>Voter registration status</u>				
Not registered to vote	61%	35	47%	53
Registered voters	<u>33%</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>29%</u>	<u>68</u>
Democrats	47%	47	39%	56
Republicans	18%	80	13%	76
Non-partisans/others*	29%	63	33%	53
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White (non-Hispanic)	28%	66	24%	75
Latino	74%	23	64%	32
Others*	41%	54	23%	77

\* Small sample base.

Differences between the sum of percentages for each year's survey and 100% equal proportion with no opinion.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 500 California adults age 18 or older conducted by telephone February 12-26, 2006 in English and Spanish. The sample included 337 registered voters and 163 who were not registered.

Telephone households were sampled using a random digit dial methodology, which randomly selects operating landline telephone exchanges within all areas codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each exchange, telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to the selected telephone exchange. This method gives each phone listing an equal chance of being selected and permits access to all landline telephone numbers statewide, both listed and unlisted.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points.

### **Questions Asked**

How concerned are you about the issue of illegal immigration – extremely concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned?

Generally speaking, do you feel that illegal or undocumented immigrants who come to California have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable effect on the state as a whole?

Do you think that illegal or undocumented immigrants are taking jobs away from other Californians and contributing to the state's unemployment problem, or do you think they are taking jobs that other Californians mostly do not want?

Do you favor or oppose reforming immigration laws to create temporary worker programs for illegal immigrants that would legalize their status and allow future immigrants to work in the U.S.?

Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose allowing illegal or undocumented workers to obtain a driver's license in California?