

Why The Obama Administration Should Do Immigration Reform in 2009

1. **Context.** The Obama/Democratic victory in 2008 produced a victory coalition of mainly African Americans, Hispanics, voters under 40, and middle-aged women. This core-coalition, if it can be held together, could provide Democrats with a governing majority for a generation.

IMMIGRATION REFORM is one of the key policy components to connecting this core-coalition because it reflects one of the principal values of the “new-Obama” American – multiculturalism.

This memo seeks to use evidence from last year’s NCLR poll and focus group research to make this case.

2. The FrederickPolls/NCLR poll linked cultural perceptions and public policy to provide unique insight as to how pushing immigration reform forward can unite this core Democrat/Obama coalition group.

First of all, voters under 40 hold a series of views toward “illegal immigrants” that are much more positive and tolerant than do voters over 40 – with women 40 to 64 being the next most positive group.

- Just 41% say “they take away jobs from American citizens” (vs. 54% aged 40+).
- Just 39% say “they choose to remain illegal” (vs. 57% over age 40).
- Just 41% say “they get free hospital care American citizens can’t get” (vs. 60 over age 40).
- Just 36% say “their children are a burden and financial drain on public schools” (vs. 60% over age 40).
- And, 71% disagree “I have no sympathy for anybody who come to live and work in this country illegally regardless of how desperate their family’s circumstances might be” (with 67% disagree among women 40-64 versus majority agreement among those over 65).

On cultural issues, voters under 40 (followed by middle-aged women) are also most open and accepting of Hispanics and Hispanic contributions to the fabric of American society.

- 70% disagree “I am worried that America is becoming too Hispanic” (vs. 48% among those 40+).

- 67% disagree “it really bothers me when people working in stores or fast food restaurants speak Spanish to each other” (vs. 42% of those 40+).
3. **Policy.** When given a choice of the most practical way to control the flow of illegal immigrants into America, 68% to 69% of those under 40 or 40 to 64 females choose a policy of tougher border security coupled with a legal guest worker program.” Support for this reasoned approach is 15 to 20 points higher for these groups than among middle-aged men or seniors who are more likely to choose the alternate policy of “spend whatever it takes to shut down the border and crack down on U.S. employers who hire illegals.”

This “accommodating” vs. “crackdown” approach also splits the electorate on the issue of “mass deportation.” Among those under 40 (70% oppose, 22% favor) and 40-64 females (65% oppose, 33% favor), the punitive approach of mass deportation for illegal immigrants is opposed by more than two-to-one. But for middle-aged men and seniors, this idea is rejected by only a narrower 55% majority.

4. **Other Measures of Multiculturalism.** Throughout the poll, the coalition of younger voters and middle-aged women show a stronger tolerance and embrace of Latino culture in America than do middle-aged men and seniors on issues such as ...
- Police profiling as racism/discrimination;
 - Hate speak being wrong;
 - Anti-Latino violence being unjustified;
 - Citizen border vigilantism being wrong; and
 - Rejection of denying local government services to those without legal documentation.
5. **Tough Economic Times + Limited Resources = A New Logic on Work and Taxes.** With the federal government now dedicating an unprecedented amount of government spending and resources to “economic stimulus,” the proponents of a more welcoming, multicultural American society have a strong case to make against the use of resources to punish and deport illegal immigrants.

It makes no sense at a time when America needs to be encouraging employment and increasing tax collections from workers to be discouraging work and blindly wasting the opportunity to turn illegal workers into legal taxpayers.

Today’s weakened economy presents a new opportunity for immigration reform.

6. **Summary.** The balance of power and thought in America has shifted. The core victory coalition for Barack Obama and the Democrats is younger, multi-ethnic and tolerant toward multiculturalism.

This is a long-term governing coalition that can be galvanized by issues like immigration reform which marginalize the isolated minority promoting hate and racial purity. This is a demographic as well as cultural battle with the majority and the future solidly on the side of change and reform.

As the poll showed, elements of immigration reform 82% of U.S. voters' support are:

- Secure borders;
- Process for legal work visas;
- Tax collection;
- Legal justice action against law breakers;
- Learning English; and
- More inclusive path to full citizenship for those who work to earn it.