

Voters support a path to legalization for immigrants here illegally

Though deeply concerned about the effects of illegal immigration on California, state voters broadly support a path to legalization for the nation's 12 million unauthorized residents, according to a new poll.

Across major demographic and partisan groups, nearly three in four of those surveyed favor an overhaul of federal immigration laws. But sharp divisions emerge over the fate of unaccompanied minors from Central America who have streamed over the U.S. border in recent months, [the USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll](#) shows.

Nearly half call for the children to be immediately deported, but a similar number say they should be allowed to stay in California as they await legal proceedings.

The dichotomy reflects a pragmatic belief that something must be done without creating an incentive that prompts more people to cross the border illicitly, said Dave Kanevsky of American Viewpoint, a Republican polling firm that helped conduct the bipartisan survey.

"Voters are compassionate to those here illegally — they recognize this is a problem that needs to be addressed," he said. "But what they don't want to do is have solutions that let the problems continue and fester.... They're compassionate to immigrants but they're not open-border advocates."

The findings also reflect a [state electorate](#) that has grown increasingly tolerant of people here illegally in the two decades since the passage of Proposition 187, the ballot measure intended to deny taxpayer-funded services to those in the country illegally. (It was virtually invalidated later by the courts.)

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Illegal immigration is a crisis or major problem, according to 72% of poll respondents. That belief was shared by strong majorities of all races, political leanings, income levels and geographic regions, and even among those who favored a conduit to legal status.

Beverly Bloom, a 59-year-old from Corona who works in physical education at a high school, said she sees the effect of unbridled immigration every day. But she doesn't want her students or their families, many of them in California illegally, punished.

"I don't want to hold it against these kids, because these kids are wonderful children," said Bloom, a Democrat. "Many of them have been here since they were infants, or their parents are undocumented, and I would hate to see these people sent back."

But she is alarmed by the consequences of illegal immigration.

"Oh my gosh, it's impacted us. Economically, for jobs, it's impacted us. Insurance, housing, our schools are overcrowded — just across the board," Bloom said. Those factors prompted her to favor deportation of the unaccompanied minors.

That crisis is the most recent flashpoint in the immigration debate, and it came to a head this summer in [Murrieta](#), drawing national attention.

Protests forced away federal buses carrying Central American parents and children apprehended after crossing into Texas and bound for the Inland Empire city's Border Patrol facility.

Nearly half of all poll respondents, and of white voters, said they would be very or somewhat concerned if they had

such a facility in their communities. Blacks and Asians were the most concerned and Latinos were the least, at 57% and 41% respectively.

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Latinos were most in favor of aiding the minors. Two-thirds of Latinos surveyed said the children should be allowed to stay while awaiting hearings on their status, compared with less than half of white voters who felt that way.

And 60% of Latinos support a legislative proposal to provide \$3 million for legal aid for the minors, compared with 41% of white voters.

David Bradford, 42, is a Republican whose mother emigrated legally from Mexico when she was a teen. He said he believes the children face potentially deadly consequences back home and must be given due process, despite the imposition on the nation.

"Being a parent, I would never be able to send my kids across Mexico with some coyote [smuggler] to hopefully get to America," said the father of two. "These parents must have been in a desperate, desperate situation."

Bradford is in the minority among Republicans, 71% of whom said the children should be returned to their home nations, a belief that aligns with the position of President Obama. Several poll participants said they feared creating a new magnet that could cause a flood across the border if the United States did not take decisive action.

"We need to educate them: 'This is our country and we would love to have you here, but these are the laws and these are the rules and you have to follow them,'" said Marjorie Irons, 55, of Modesto. "It's chaos."

Irons said she volunteers for the American Red Cross and has friends helping the minors. "Your heart goes out to these people, but we have to get the message out to the home countries that this isn't the way to do it."

Such divisions largely disappeared on the broader question of federal immigration laws. A proposal stalled in Congress that includes heightened security and a pathway to legality was supported by nearly three in four Democrats, Republicans, tea party supporters and unaffiliated voters and a strong majority in various ethnic, age, income and geographic groups.

Drew Lieberman of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, the Democratic half of the survey team, said the proposal had widespread support partly because it includes provisions that appeal to varying interests.

Components include more border security, employer verification of their workers' legality, fines for those who hire people in the country illegally and requirements that applicants learn English and pay taxes and a penalty.

"It has a little bit of something for everybody," Lieberman said.

The USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences/Los Angeles Times poll canvassed 1,507 registered state voters by telephone from Sept. 2 through 8. The margin of error overall is 2.9 percentage points, higher for subgroups.

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