

Most Nonwhites & Westerners Favor Bush Proposal on Mexican Immigrants

The nation divides over a Bush administration proposal to offer legal residency to illegal immigrants from Mexico, with support strongest among nonwhites and in the West.

Overall, 43 percent of Americans say they'd support a plan "in which illegal immigrants from Mexico would be allowed to live and work legally in the United States," while 49 percent say they'd oppose it. Details have not been fleshed out by the administration.

Most opinions are not strongly held; 13 percent support the idea "strongly," while 30 percent say they strongly oppose it. That shows room for both sides to influence views on the issue, though the opposition starts from a stronger base.

RACE, REGION – Most striking are the racial and regional differences: Forty percent of whites support the idea; this jumps to 62 percent of nonwhites. And it wins 56 percent support in the West, compared to a low of 37 percent in the Midwest.

Some political strategists have promoted the idea as a way for Bush to improve his support among Hispanics, who backed Al Gore by 62-35 percent last November. But the plan is less popular in George W. Bush's base; Republicans oppose it by 58-36 percent.

	Legal residency for illegal immigrants from Mexico	
	Support	Oppose
All	43%	49
Nonwhites	62	31
Whites	40	53
West	56	38
East	45	44
South	39	53
Midwest	37	58
Independents	48	44
Democrats	45	48
Republicans	36	58

Bush on Friday denied any political motivation. "There are people in Mexico who have got children who are worried about where they are going to get their next meal from," he said. "And they are going to come to the United States, if they think they can make money here. That's a simple fact. And they're willing to walk across miles of desert to do work that some Americans won't do. And we've got to respect that, it seems like to me,

and treat those people with respect.”

SUPPORT/OPPOSE – Opposition across the population is lower than might be expected, given that people who’d benefit from such a program are here illegally. That’s an issue raised by critics such as Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., and Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Tex., who’s warned against any program that “rewards lawlessness.” Support could rise, too, if the ultimate program is limited to illegal immigrants who have been paying taxes here, as some have proposed.

Some Democrats have complained that the program may be limited to illegal immigrants from Mexico, not from elsewhere, though this, too, is not clear. Last night Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle said he favors legalization for all undocumented workers who’ve been working and paying taxes in the United States.

As of now – with the unsettled state of the program’s details - this poll finds somewhat less support for a broader program that would include non-Mexican immigrants: Opposition advances to 56 percent, with support at 38 percent.

Legal status for	Support	Oppose
illegal immigrants		
... from Mexico	43%	49
... from other countries	38	56

There are an estimated three to four million Mexicans in the United States illegally, and it’s been reported that as many as half of them could fall under the plan being devised by the Bush administration. A law passed by Congress and signed by Ronald Reagan in 1986 gave legal status to an estimated three million illegal immigrants from all countries. (It didn’t help Bush’s father with Hispanics in 1988; he lost them by 69-30 percent.)

Bush has said he opposes any such “blanket amnesty,” maintaining that the term “amnesty” isn’t applicable to the program he has in mind. It’s been described instead as a “guest worker” program in which illegal immigrants could register for available jobs and move gradually toward permanent residency status.

Bush is expected to continue discussions on the issue next week with Mexican President Vicente Fox, who has urged U.S. immigration reform. Fox arrives Tuesday, honored as the Bush administration’s first official state visitor.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone August 22-26, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,024 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results:

106. Would you support or oppose a program in which illegal immigrants from Mexico would be allowed to live and work legally in the United States? Would you support/oppose it strongly or only somewhat?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
8/26/01	43	13	30	49	20	30	7

107. Would you support or oppose a program in which illegal immigrants from countries other than Mexico would be allowed to live and work legally in the United States? Would you support/oppose it strongly or only somewhat?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
8/26/01	38	10	28	56	21	35	6

END