# The New Middle on Immigration

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Bipartisan Policy Center's survey of national voter's views about immigration found that Americans describe our current immigration system as:

- "Broken"
- "Out of control"
- "Antiquated"

- The survey also found that Americans are more concerned about:
  - Competition for "benefits" than for "jobs."
  - The "type of immigrants" than the "number of immigrants."

- And that overall Americans want a system that is:
  - "Strongly enforced"
  - "Fair"
  - "Consistent"

BPC′s survey found that Americans largely agree on:

– The benefits of immigration;

– The types of reforms they would like to see in the country′s immigration system; and

– The political actors whom they trust to carry out these reforms.

• However, the survey did find that the respondents′ views about these issues could vary significantly by partisan affiliation, demographic groups, and regional locations.

• Nevertheless, the survey suggests that American′s views on immigration revolve around a ″New Middle″ that sits further to the right than previously assumed by many lawmakers, advocates, and researchers.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- The survey was conducted from March 28 to April 5, 2018 (before child separation went into effect).

- It comprised 1,004 likely voters across the United States; 39 percent of voters were Democrats, 37 percent Republican, and 24 percent Independent.

- The survey's 75 questions were not focused on testing particular messages around specific policies, but further examining views and preferences of the current and a future immigration system.

- The survey emphasized rank order multiple choice questions to gain the greatest possible understanding of how voters chose between different policy options and descriptors.

# Findings

**Over half of respondents said that immigration either "somewhat" or "completely" helps the United States**

- **Age matters:** 62 percent of individuals under age 40 said immigration "helps America" compared to 47 percent of respondents over age 65.

- **Income matters as well:** the higher the income, the more likely respondents were to say that immigration "helps America." Having some higher education had a similar effect.

- **Region played a role:** people living the in the Pacific or the East were more likely to say immigration "helps America," and urban voters were more positive than rural voters by a 25 percent spread.

**Voters want immigration reform to prioritize "national security," resolving the status of the undocumented (or "legalization"), and "stricter immigration enforcement"**

- **Age variations emerged in these responses:** voters under age 40 ranked "legalization" higher than "national security," as did college graduates.

- **Religious differences were also notable:** Protestants ranked "stricter immigration enforcement" higher than "national security" while Evangelicals ranked "legalization" lowest in their list of preferences.

- **Regional differences appeared as well:** those living in the Pacific or in urban areas ranked "legalization" above "national security." However, respondents in the Pacific also ranked "stricter immigration enforcement" higher than "national security."

# PREFERENCES FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

**Voters stated that the immigration system should be "strongly enforced," "fair," and "consistent"**

- **Partisan differences were strong:** Republicans overwhelmingly picked "strongly enforced" as the most important descriptor while Democrats evenly picked "fair," "consistent," and "compassionate" as the top three descriptors

- **Religious differences were notable:** Evangelicals ranked "values-based" third, the highest of any religious affiliation, after "strictly enforced" and "consistent." Protestants ranked "compassionate" only seventh out of 15 options.

- **Geographic differences appeared as well:** Urban voters ranked "strict" higher than suburban or rural voters did, coming in third for urban voters behind "fair" and "strongly enforced."
  - "Strongly enforced" was the top descriptor in all geographic regions, but it was highest in the West and Midwest and lowest in the Pacific.

**Respondents said the most important benefits the United States can gain from an effective immigration system are "diversity," "attracting the best and brightest," and "safety from terrorist and criminal threats"**

- **Partisan groups varied in their responses:** Republicans chose "safety from terrorism and criminal threats" first while Democrats overwhelmingly chose "diversity" first.

- **Demographics and regions also shaped these views:** voters under age 40 placed "diversity" first, as did women, those who identified with no religion or a non-Christian religion, those living in the Pacific, and those in urban areas.

**Voters said the immigration system should prioritize immigrants who are "law abiding," "actively integrating and learning English," and "hardworking"**

- Partisan differences were key: Republican voters ranked "integration" over "law abiding" and ranked "self-reliance" above the other choices.
  - Democrats also rated "law abiding" first but ranked "hardworking" second, with "integration" still coming in third.

- Demographic differences were important: "Law abiding" ranked highest among voters ages 40 to 64, while those under age 40 ranked "hardworking" slightly higher.
  - Those earning less still emphasized "law abiding" and "integration" over "hardworking" or "highly skilled."

- Regional divides appeared as well: Rural voters were slightly more likely to choose "self-reliant" over "hardworking."

**Two-thirds of voters said it is "extremely important" or "very important" that immigrants can hold a basic conversation in English before they come to the United States**

- **Partisanship impacts the intensity for supporting this option:** 82 percent of Republicans said conversational English is either "extremely important" or "very important" while only 49 percent of Democrats agreed.

- **Responses also varied by religious affiliation:** Catholics were most likely to support the English requirement out of other religious affiliations.

- **Regional differences appeared as well:** Voters living in the South and in rural areas were most supportive of English.

**The voters surveyed said they were most concerned about "terrorism" and "drugs" coming through the border, with "illegal immigration" third**

- **Partisan differences were strong:** Republicans ranked "illegal immigration" as their key priority and Democrats rated "human trafficking" higher.

- **Geographic differences were notable:** voters in the West, Midwest, and Pacific ranked "drug trafficking" highest. Suburban voters ranked "drug trafficking" and "human trafficking" above "terrorism" or "illegal immigration."

**Voters said "surveillance technology" and "physical barriers" are more effective on the border than "stronger penalties" for illegal immigrants or "more border patrol officers"**

- **Partisan differences emerged in the respondents' responses to this question:** GOP voters ranked "physical barriers" highest while Democratic voters overwhelmingly said "surveillance technology."

- **Demographic and regional differences were other points of division:** there was more support for "physical barriers" in the South and among rural voters and voters over age 65.

# Almost half of all voters approved of president trump's proposed border wall (48 percent)

- **Party mattered most in how people answered:** 84 percent of Republicans "completely" or "somewhat" approved of the wall. Democrats either "completely" or "somewhat" disapproved of the wall, at 73 percent.

- **Voters views about the wall varied by region as well:** voters living in the South or in rural areas were most supportive of the wall.

**Americans were split on who they trust to offer the best immigration solutions: the combined responses were split equally among "federal immigration authorities," "immigration and human rights groups," and "the president"**

- **Partisanship impacted this choice:** Republicans chose "the president" at 43 percent, while Democrats chose "congressional Democrats."

**However, nearly three-quarters of surveyed Americans said that the "federal government" should take the lead on immigration reform, not "state and local governments"**

- **Demographics shaped this preference:** the younger the respondent, the more support for leadership from "state and local governments" increased. 36 percent of those under age 40 thought states should take the lead.