

Public Wants Immigrants to Be Able to Stay

By [Ronald Brownstein](#)

December 6, 2011 | 9:30 p.m.

As the debate over immigration continues to roil the Republican presidential field, a substantial majority of Americans say they would prefer to allow some or all illegal immigrants to remain in the United States, the latest United Technologies/*National Journal* Congressional Connection Poll has found.

When asked what should be done with the roughly 11 million illegal immigrants in the country, just 25 percent of those polled said that they should all be deported “no matter how long they have been in the U.S.”

Another 28 percent of those surveyed said that all illegal immigrants should be allowed “to stay, provided they have broken no other laws and commit to learning English and U.S. history.” The largest group, at 39 percent, said that the United States should “deport some, but allow those who have been here for many years and have broken no other laws to stay here legally.”

The United Technologies/*National Journal* Congressional Connection Poll was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from Dec. 1 to 4; it interviewed 1,008 adults by landline and cell phone. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The poll’s three options on immigration correspond approximately to the positions of the three leading figures in the 2012 presidential race. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, now emerging as the GOP front-runner, has advocated the third option: He argues that longtime illegal immigrants who have broken no other laws should be granted a right to stay in the country, although without citizenship, by local community boards.

Mitt Romney, the erstwhile Republican front-runner, has aligned himself closest to the first option. He has said that Gingrich’s plan amounts to amnesty and that all illegal immigrants should receive no special privileges in applying for citizenship, although he has been somewhat vague on whether he believes they should be required to leave the country before doing so.

President Obama, like most Democrats, has argued that all illegal immigrants who have committed no other crime should be provided a pathway to citizenship, so long as they meet certain requirements, such as learning English.

In the survey, the views of Republican and Democratic voters diverged somewhat but generally overlapped more than the rhetoric of each party’s national leaders. This is consistent with other polling that has regularly shown that even a substantial portion of the GOP electorate views mass deportation as unworkable.

In the Congressional Connection Poll, just 33 percent of Republicans supported deporting all illegal immigrants. That's significantly more than the 15 percent of Democrats who backed that approach. In a roughly mirror image, just 19 percent of Republicans wanted to allow all illegal immigrants to stay, compared with 32 percent of Democrats. In both parties, though, the largest group aligned behind the choice Gingrich has championed: allowing long-term illegal immigrants who have not broken any other law to remain. Forty-three percent of Republicans and 42 percent of Democrats backed that option. Independents split almost evenly between the three options.

Similarly, while the results contained important racial differences, the gap was not as large as it was on some other issues. Even among whites, just 28 percent support deporting all illegal immigrants, while 24 percent want to allow all to remain, and 40 percent want to deport some.

The poll also found public skepticism about another conservative priority. Last month, the House passed legislation requiring any state that allows residents to carry concealed weapons to recognize the concealed-carry permits granted by every other state. That legislation attracted 58 votes when Sen. **John Thune**, R-S.D., offered it in the Senate in 2009, and his staff says he is considering options to attach the proposal to other legislation now.

The poll presented respondents with brief arguments for and against the idea, noting: "Supporters say this is necessary to ensure people authorized to carry concealed weapons in their own state can protect themselves wherever they are," while "Opponents say it would undermine each state's ability to set its own standards for who can carry guns, like age or training requirements."

After hearing those arguments, 49 percent of adults said they opposed the legislation and believed it "should not become law." Just 40 percent said they supported it. The idea precipitated a sharp gender gap: Although men supported it by a narrow 47 percent to 45 percent plurality, women opposed it by a solid 53 percent to 33 percent majority. Whites narrowly opposed the idea, while minorities resisted it by a larger margin.

Education among whites marked another important dividing line. The concealed-weapons bill drew support from a plurality of whites without four-year degrees (and support from nearly three-fifths of such noncollege men). Meanwhile, college-educated whites opposed the proposal by 2-to-1.

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/daily/public-wants-immigrants-to-be-able-to-stay-20111206>