

On immigration reform, more Americans hew to the Democrats' stance

Forty-eight percent of Americans say their views on immigration reform align best with the Democratic Party, compared with 36 percent whose views are closer to the Republican Party, a new poll shows. The gap is much wider for blacks and Hispanics.

By Jennifer Skalka Tulumello, Correspondent / July 15, 2013

The [Gallup survey](#), released Monday, indicates that 48 percent believe the Democratic Party's policies on immigration and immigration reform are closer to their own, while 36 percent said the same of the Republican Party.

It is the demographic breakdown within the poll, however, that provides a caution for the [GOP](#), as members consider whether to nix legislation providing a path to citizenship for certain illegal immigrants or to get on board. As Republicans more broadly assess how to reposition their party nationally in advance of the open 2016 [White House](#) contest, aiming to shake loose the Democrats' hold on vote-rich minority constituencies, the immigration issue has grown in political importance.

Some 70 percent of blacks and 60 percent of Hispanics surveyed by Gallup more closely aligned with the Democrats, with 14 percent and 26 percent, respectively, identifying with the Republican Party. Whites are split – 41 percent say Democrats' views come closer to their own, while 42 percent were with the Republicans.

In its analysis, Gallup notes that the percentage of Hispanics indicating a preference for Democratic immigration reform policies is higher than the 51 percent found during the 2012 contest to generally identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party.

Hispanics were a crucial voting bloc in the past two presidential campaigns, giving strong margins to [President Obama](#) over his Republican rivals, [Sen. John McCain](#) of Arizona in 2008 and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney in 2012. Their backing helped Mr. Obama win in key battleground states, including [Florida](#), Virginia, Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico.

To see Hispanics moving with marginally more strength toward the party that currently holds the White House should give pause to Republican opponents of immigration reform – especially those considering a future national campaign. The issue has fragmented the GOP, with some conservatives – namely Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and his state's former governor, Jeb Bush – pushing for reform that includes some kind of a path to citizenship. Others, including Sens. Rand Paul of [Kentucky](#) and Ted Cruz of Texas, have dug in on the issue, [voting against legislation](#) that was passed by the full Senate last month.

Senator McCain, who represents a heavily Hispanic state but who is also [aware of the political importance](#) of the voting bloc, was, of course, part of the so-called Gang of Eight who crafted the legislation and backed the bill.

Meanwhile, another voting group that helped carry Obama to victory in both cycles – young people – narrowly favors the Democrats’ approach on immigration reform. Gallup shows that among white Americans between the ages of 18 and 49, 44 percent line up with the Democratic Party’s immigration policies and 39 percent choose the Republican Party. Whites 50 and older flipped – 46 percent named the Republicans and 39 percent the Democrats.

It’s worth noting that while the Democrats have an advantage with Hispanics and young voters, independents – another coveted group come the nation’s quadrennial contest – were split, with 37 percent choosing the Democrats and 35 percent identifying with Republicans. Those with strong Democratic Party or Republican Party identification tend to side with their own parties on immigration reform.

Those polled who favor tightening border security and requiring employers to check immigration status of their workers, two signature Republican issues, are "about equally likely to name the Democratic or the Republican Party as the one they more agree with on immigration," according to Gallup.

House Speaker John Boehner has said his chamber will not take up the Senate’s bill, suggesting instead that his members might craft a separate plan that emphasizes stronger border controls. His Republican members are divided about how to tackle the nation’s undocumented residents. So it’s not clear if the House will move on any legislation tackling the matter; agreement on the best steps forward has so far been elusive.

This past weekend, though, Senate minority leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R) of Kentucky [advised his House colleagues against inaction](#).

“I’m a big fan of what legal immigration has done for our country,” Senator McConnell said, mentioning that his wife, Elaine Chao, was born in Taiwan and served as [US](#) Labor secretary under President George W. Bush. “I hope, even though the Senate bill in my view is deficient on the issue of border security, I hope we can get an outcome for the country that improves the current situation. I don't think anybody is satisfied with the status quo on immigration, and I hope the House will be able to move forward on something.”

Gallup’s results were based on a poll of 4,373 US adults; the survey was conducted between June 13 and July 5. The margin of error is 2 percentage points for the full survey. Due to weighting methods, it is 3 percentage points for results pertaining to non-Hispanic whites, 5 percentage points for results on non-Hispanic blacks, and 6 percentage points for Hispanics.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/DC-Decoder/Decoder-Wire/2013/0715/On-immigration-reform-more-Americans-hew-to-the-Democrats-stance>