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What is the issue?

Immigration has been one of the most discussed issues in the United States for the past two years. While much attention has focused on national policy debates, the actual impacts of immigration are experienced locally. Immigrants (often unauthorized) have settled across the American landscape, often in places that until recently have had little contact with immigrants. Communities around the nation have reacted in diverse ways. In the past year there have been reports of communities like Hazelton, PA enacting local ordinances to keep unauthorized immigrants from settling in their communities. In contrast, New Haven, CN was recently in the news when it made efforts to provide official identification to unauthorized immigrants living in the community. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that there are about 12 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. with an estimated additional 400 to 500 thousand arriving annually. Efforts to stem the tide of unauthorized immigration have led to increased border enforcement, encouraging more unauthorized immigrants to stay in the U.S. for extended periods. The trend toward more extended residence has been underway for more than a decade, and immigrants are more visible in places large and small throughout the country. And this presence is not likely to end soon. With increased border enforcement, the tendency for unauthorized immigrants to stay in the U.S. for an extended period will be reinforced. If immigration reform includes provisions for a special visa for unauthorized immigrants already in the country, they will have the option to stay in the U.S. for several years, and if immigration policy reform results in granting these immigrants the option of becoming naturalized

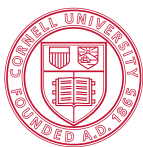
Citizens, many will likely settle in the places they have come to work.

New York has long been an immigrant gateway, and the concerns expressed nationwide are shared by New Yorkers. The Census Bureau estimated there to be about 4 million foreign born persons living in New York in 2005 (second only to California), and the Pew Hispanic Center has estimated that in the same year the unauthorized immigrant population in New York to be about 600,000. Although the bulk of immigrants in the state are found in New York City, like the U.S. more generally, immigrants are increasingly dispersed across the landscape, and New Yorkers statewide are more likely than ever to have some experience with immigrants. About one in five New Yorkers are foreign born.

Methodology

- The Empire State Poll (ESP) conducted 800 telephone interviews between January 25, 2007 and March 28, 2007, equally divided by upstate/downstate, and then weighted to reflect actual population distribution within the state.
- The ESP utilizes a random digit dial (RDD) sample of NYS households. Eligible respondents must be residents of NYS and at least 18 years old.
- The cooperation rate was 55.2% using American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards.
- The margin of error (MOE) for reported statewide results is 3.5% and is 4.9% for upstate/downstate comparisons. The MOE may be smaller for some questions depending on number the of response options. For regional comparisons, "Downstate" is defined as New York, Rockland, Kings, Richmond, Westchester, Suffolk, Queens, Nassau, and Bronx counties, with the remaining counties of the state defined as "upstate."

See Report 1: Introduction & Methodology for full description at www.sri.cornell.edu.



Survey Findings

The recently completed Empire State Poll offers a glimpse at the how New Yorkers view immigrants. Of the eight hundred New Yorkers interviewed, more than two-thirds reported that they personally know an immigrant. Not surprisingly, more than three-fourths of those living in and around New York City personally know an immigrant, but upstate more than one-half (53%) also know an immigrant, offering some indication of the dispersion of immigrants across the state. Given the widespread presence of immigrants in New York and the tendency for them to settle for longer periods of time, the Empire State Poll asked New Yorkers whether they considered immigrants to be an asset or a burden in their community. Less than one in ten (9%) consider immigrants to be a burden, and about one-third (31%) consider them to be an asset in their community. The most common response, however, was that immigrants were both an asset and a burden (41%).

The mixed feelings expressed by New Yorkers likely reflect some of the challenges they see as communities attempt to deal with a growing immigrant population. The limited English language ability of immigrants is a frequently expressed concern, so the Empire State Poll asked New Yorkers how important it is for their community to provide English language training for immigrants. New Yorkers are strongly supportive of efforts in their own communities to provide English language training. More than four out of five think the provision of such training is important and almost two-thirds (65%) responded that it is *very* important. This support cut across all personal characteristics including political party identification, upstate/downstate residence, educational background, race, Hispanic heritage and religious affiliation.

Another local concern is the availability of affordable housing for the growing immigrant population. The Empire State Poll asked how important it is for their community to provide affordable housing for immigrants. More than 60 percent think it is important for the community to provide affordable housing, and about 40 percent consider it very important. Only about one-fifth thought it is unimportant. Political party identification is the personal characteristic most strongly associated with support for community efforts to provide affordable housing. The majority of those who identified themselves as a strong Democrat were strongly supportive of community efforts to provide

affordable housing. In contrast, less than 20 percent of those who identify themselves as strong Republican are supportive of this local measure. These differences mirror the schisms apparent in national immigration policy debates.

As is true nationwide, New Yorkers are somewhat divided about how much immigration to the U.S. is desirable. To see how New Yorkers viewed immigration on a national scale, the Empire State Poll asked, “Thinking *not* just about your town, but the U.S. as a whole, do you think that the number of foreign immigrants coming into the United States should be increased, decreased, or remain about the same? The majority (53%) responded the number should stay the same, slightly up from last year’s Empire State Poll. A little more than one-third (36%) thought it should decline, down from last year’s poll, and only about 10% thought that the number of immigrant coming to the U.S. should increase.

Summary

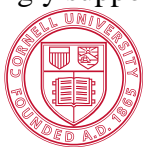
Discussions of federal immigration policy reforms are divisive, and opinions are divided about how much immigration the country can absorb. But Americans are most likely to directly experience the effects of immigration in their own communities. When asked about their own communities New Yorkers seldom see immigrants as a burden and a sizeable majority is supportive of local measures to accommodate some basic needs of immigrants like English language training and affordable housing. Whatever the outcome of the national immigration policy debates, communities will likely need to deal with the presence of immigrants, and the opinions of expressed by New Yorkers suggest that they are prepared to have their communities take on this challenge.

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