**Fear of Immigration**

**Americans Appear to be More Afraid of the President than Immigration**

President Trump must love Halloween. His campaign was based on fear, particularly of immigrants, and he stoked that fear from the moment he announced his candidacy in a speech where he said, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best…. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

Results from the Chapman University of American Fears show that a majority of Americans do not currently share the President’s concerns over immigration. In fact, a year and a half after his election, more Americans expressed concern over the President than illegal immigration. When we asked in our 2018 survey if President Trump had ever made them feel afraid, a majority, 58.7%, responded yes. When asked if they were afraid of illegal immigration, a majority, 59.3% reported that they were not afraid (other responses to this item: 9.3% reported very afraid, 12.2% reported afraid, and 19.3% reported slightly afraid).

When we reported these results in 2018, we noted that the survey was conducted during the period when the Trump administration’s family separation policy was a top news story, creating a firestorm of criticism that forced the administration to change course. The news cycle may have affected these results. Below, we compare these results to our most recent survey, conducted in the summer of 2019.

**American Opinion on Immigrants**

Anti-immigrant sentiment has a long history in the United States. In the late 19th century, German, Irish, and especially Chinese immigrants were targets of broad political movements. In the early 20th century, the focus of concern was on immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. These movements were powerful enough that Congress voted for a complete ban on Chinese immigration in 1882 – an outcome the President has wished for other ethnic groups but has been unable to accomplish.

At this point in our history, despite Presidential rhetoric, the proportion of Americans expressing concern about immigrants is a minority, though a significant one -- roughly one out of 3. There has perhaps been a slight uptick in anti-immigration sentiment in the year since the media reduced its focus on the conditions under which children are being detained, but the differences are small and not always consistent.

Percent expressing agreement with the following statements:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 |
|   | Strongly Agree or Agree | Strongly Agree or Agree |
| Immigrants are more likely to commit crime than U.S. citizens. |  18.6 | 21.2 |
| Recent immigrants are more reluctant to assimilate than previous immigrants. | 38.9 | 39.2 |
| Immigrants are a drain on the economy. | 35.7 | 33.5 |
| Immigrants bring diseases into the United States. | 28.8 | 33.5 |
| Police should be allowed to raid businesses and homes in order to find undocumented workers. | 29.3 | 31.7 |
| Deportation is a good solution for immigration issues. | 40.4 | 45.7 |
| Creating a “pathway to citizenship” will encourage illegal immigration. | 29.1 | 33.4 |
| America should cease all immigration from Muslim countries. | 20.7 | 20.2 |
| America should build a wall on the border with Mexico. | 35.6 | 37.5 |

**Political Orientation and Opinions on Immigrants**

When we look at anti-immigrant sentiment by political orientation, the overall results seem predictable. Those who identify as conservative are more likely to hold anti-immigrant opinions. Of particular interest, however, are the opinions of those in the middle groups – those who define themselves as moderates or leaning toward conservative or liberal positions. Large majorities of moderates and those leaning liberal do not hold anti-immigrant opinions. Among those who lean conservative, there is majority support for only three of the nine items. This suggests that continued anti-immigrant rhetoric is likely to continue to appeal to the President’s base, but unlikely to appeal to swing voters.

Percent reporting “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the following statements: 2019:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Extremely Conservative | Conservative | Leaning Conservative | Moderate | Leaning Liberal | Liberal | Extremely Liberal |
| Immigrants are more likely to commit crime than U.S. citizens. | 62.1 | 43.7 | 28.1 | 18 | 2.3 | 0.6 | 0 |
| Recent immigrants are more reluctant to assimilate than previous immigrants. | 68.4 | 66.5 | 53.7 | 40.6 | 14.5 | 9.4 | 4.8 |
| Immigrants are a drain on the economy. | 75.4 | 64.5 | 47.8 | 31.8 | 5.3 | 1.3 | 4.8 |
| Immigrants bring diseases into the United States. | 75.4 | 64.5 | 47.8 | 31.8 | 5.3 | 1.3 | 4.8 |
| Police should be allowed to raid businesses and homes in order to find undocumented workers. | 71.9 | 54.1 | 50.7 | 29.1 | 14.4 | 2.5 | 4.8 |
| Deportation is a good solution for immigration issues. | 87.9 | 82.4 | 66.9 | 42.1 | 22 | 5 | 7.1 |
| Creating a “pathway to citizenship” will encourage illegal immigration. | 66.7 | 57.3 | 44.4 | 32.3 | 12.9 | 10 | 6 |
| America should cease all immigration from Muslim countries. | 68.4 | 39.4 | 17 | 18.5 | 6.7 | 0 | 4.8 |
| America should build a wall on the border with Mexico. | 94.7 | 69.6 | 54.8 | 28.7 | 8.3 | 1.9 | 3.6 |

The President continues to push anti-immigration policies as a hallmark of his presidency. The majority of the American people do not believe immigration is as frightening as the President himself.