

Despite Trump's anti-immigrant hysteria, US polls show broad support for immigrants

Eric London
20 March 2017

A series of recent polls show significant popular opposition in the American population to Donald Trump's mass deportation program.

A CNN poll released March 17 shows that 90 percent of Americans believe the government should give immigrants who have lived and worked in the US for a number of years the right to apply for US citizenship, including 84 percent of Trump voters. The total percent opposed to such a proposal has fallen by half since 2014.

This statistic explodes the narrative advanced by Trump, the corporate media, the Democratic Party and the upper-middle class "left" groups orbiting the Democrats, which claims that a racist, backward white working class is fueling Trump's anti-immigrant campaign. The 90 percent figure is all the more remarkable since it comes in the wake of a decades-long bipartisan campaign to scapegoat immigrants for the social and economic crisis. This overwhelming majority refutes even Robert F. Kennedy's popular political aphorism: "About one-fifth of the people are against everything all of the time."

Support for immigrants crosses all major demographic and regional categories: 92 percent among those with incomes under \$50,000, 91 percent of white non-college graduates, 92 percent of rural voters, 90 percent of those aged 65 and over, 93 percent of Midwesterners, 89 percent of Southerners, and 86 percent of Republicans.

The CNN poll also shows that 60 percent of Americans believe the government's top immigration priority should be ensuring undocumented immigrants have the right to remain in the US. This compares with just 13 percent who say the government should prioritize deportation, and 26 percent who say the US should stop immigrants from entering the US without

documents.

These numbers have increased significantly within the last two years. In September 2015, 46 percent of respondents said the government should prioritize defending the rights of immigrants.

Those with incomes under \$50,000 are slightly more likely to support legalization as the top immigration priority, and this option retains the support of over 50 percent of all age groups and regional areas, including Southerners, the elderly and whites without a college degree.

Similarly, 71 percent of respondents say the government should not carry out a mass deportation plan, up from 63 percent in December 2015. The program is particularly hated amongst young people and those living in urban areas, where they are more likely to live amongst larger immigrant populations. Trump supporters are split evenly on the deportation plan.

Fifty-eight percent of people say current US immigration policies go too far, including majorities of every age demographic and region.

A second poll from the Pew Research Center titled "Americans express increasingly warm feelings toward religious groups" was published in February 2017. According to the poll, Muslims and atheists are the two groups whose popularity is growing most substantially. Compared with three years ago, Americans are more tolerant of members of every religious group except evangelical Christians, whose popularity did not increase.

The Pew report notes that growing acceptance of Muslims in particular is due to a 7 percent increase in the percentage of people who personally know a Muslim person. Among young people, Muslims are as popular as evangelical Christians and Mainline

Protestants and more popular than Mormons. Older Americans and evangelical Christians remain the only groups who hold relatively cool feelings toward Muslims.

Additional polls from 2017 show:

- 62 percent oppose the building of a wall along the US-Mexico border.
- 77 percent believe undocumented immigrants are “less likely” or “about as likely” to commit crimes than US citizens.
- 68 percent oppose suspending all immigration of Syrian refugees to the US.

There remains significant political confusion, in particular on the question of the rights of immigrants with criminal records. Seventy-eight percent of respondents to the CNN poll say the government should deport those with criminal records, though even this figure is down from 83 percent in September 2016. Older and less educated populations are more likely to support deporting those with criminal records, for example.

Such confusion is inevitable amidst the deluge of anti-immigrant hysteria whipped up by the press and both parties of big business. What the polls show, however, is considerable sympathy for immigrants, particularly in the working class, and regardless of race.

The vast majority of the American working class lives and interacts with immigrants in their daily lives, confronts the same social problems and sympathizes with their struggle. Families are increasingly international and multi-ethnic, and 21 percent of US married couples include at least one foreign-born spouse.

Furthermore, the entire non-Native American population is the progeny of immigrants whose stories linger in the family folklore of tens of millions. Data from the 2000 census (national heritage was not listed in the 2010 survey) shows that the US population includes 49 million German descendants, 35 million Irish, 32 million Mexican, 27 million English, 17 million Italians, 10 million Polish, 9 million French, etc.

That Trump’s attempts to whip-up anti-immigrant hysteria have so far failed to gain broad support does not reduce the danger posed by his program. Trump and his advisors are attempting to build support for a fascist movement aimed at channeling growing social tensions

against immigrants in order to prosecute the financial aristocracy’s plans for war abroad and social counterrevolution domestically.

The Democratic Party, which passed the laws used to deport millions, has largely accepted Trump’s xenophobic program and has only opposed him on the basis of a mixture of anti-Russian nationalism and the identity politics of the affluent upper-middle class. In their right-wing campaign, the Democrats are establishing the conditions in which a fascistic movement may take root. Only the working class, organized independently of both parties in a common struggle for social equality, is capable of protecting the rights of immigrants.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact