



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

Public Opinion Research:

*In Play:
African American, Hispanic,
and Progressive White Voters
on Immigration Reform*

About The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds and policy over time, the organization works closely with social justice organizations, leaders, and movements to advocate for solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and promising solutions; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

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Executive Summary

Project Background

The Opportunity Agenda commissioned GfK to conduct an online survey of three important constituencies to evaluate support and messaging around comprehensive immigration reform and its elements. The survey was conducted among African-American Likely Voters (AAs), Hispanic Likely Voters, and White Progressive Likely Voters (WPs). For each group, about 300 interviews were conducted between February 22 and March 5, 2010. The survey covered the following subjects:

- ▶ The current political climate for immigration reform, including its relative importance, the desire for immediate action, and the values people associate with immigration.
- ▶ Support levels for the core narrative – “We need workable solutions that uphold our values and move us forward together” – as well as for a Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) proposal, from its most basic form (path to legal status) to several alternative detailed proposals.
- ▶ Support for the possible elements of reform.
- ▶ Testing messages the progressive community could likely use in the debate.
- ▶ Head-to-Head testing of messages from the pro-reform and anti-reform sides of the debate.
- ▶ Likelihood of taking actions to support reform and pro-reform candidates.
- ▶ Demographics for balancing the sample and providing profiles of key attitudinal groups.

Key Findings

- ▶ There is broad support across all groups for the core narrative focused on “workable solutions that uphold our nation’s values, and move us forward together.” Majorities of these consistencies (51% - 63%) support immigration reform, defined as a process for illegal immigrants already in the country to register and live here legally, before they hear anything about it.
- ▶ There is also near-unanimity in the importance of welcoming immigrants into the social fabric.
- ▶ While support for reform exists, urgency for reform does not. Most agree the system is broken, but immigration is a relatively lower priority issue in today’s climate. However, most (but not all, especially among WP) would like to see the issue addressed this year.
- ▶ Across all three major demographic groups surveyed, “Law and Order” is the top value that likely voters seek embodied in immigration policy. Among AAs and WPs likely voters, “Respect for American Culture” is a strong second, followed by “Equality” and “Fairness.” Hispanic voters do have a somewhat different values profile than either African American or White Progressive voters, but they are by no means entirely dissimilar. Hispanics, too, rank “Law and order” first, with “Fairness,” “Opportunity,” and “Respect for American Culture” clustered together in the second tier.
- ▶ The dominant values running through the persuadable block of voters centers on Law and Order and Respect for American culture. However, Persuadables also react positively to messages that focus on basic rights, practical solutions, and attacks on big business. Avoiding attacks on enforcement, while addressing basic rights and the contributions (taxes paid) of undocumented workers will help maximize support for CIR.
- ▶ Hispanic voters empathize more with immigrant aspirations for opportunity and family unification, but they, too, place “Law and Order” at the top of the list of values that immigrant policy should promote.

- ▶ Public opinion toward CIR is highly elastic within these three groups. That is, the majority of likely voters polled is “in play” and can be attracted to and repelled from reform depending on what elements they understand any such proposal to contain. One-third of the sample favored reform each time they were asked about it, and just 6% did not favor reform (either opposed it, or were on the fence) each time they were asked about it.
- ▶ CIR enjoys widespread support across the target groups, and support builds when CIR is defined by specific policies. The research indicates that policies are paramount, and there is wider latitude in the choice of messages used to win support for CIR.
- ▶ In all three demographic groups, the three most popular elements of CIR are, in order, the requirements to: 1) pay taxes, 2) pass a criminal background check, and 3) register with the government.
- ▶ Even with the fluidity in commitment to CIR, there is support for reform across each of the groups from the outset, and support grows and is largely sustained as the debate is put into more contexts. At the outset (Q4), AAs show the lowest support for reform (51%), and Hispanics the highest (63%). Within each of these three target groups, the overall pattern of opinion stability is remarkably similar (and will be explored in much more detail in the next section of this report).
- ▶ The group of voters who resist supporting CIR includes some of the most progressive, as indicated by their much stronger emphasis on the need for immigration policy to promote opportunity.
- ▶ Respondents defined as “persuadable” were drawn to support CIR with a number of harder-line policy elements, but their reactions to more progressive messages is also generally positive.
- ▶ Across several message pairings that tested two messages head-to-head, pitting a progressive message against an anti-reform message, the progressive message prevails.