

Immigration Policy Preferences: Experimental Evidence from a National Survey of Registered Voters

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Introduction

This survey was fielded online from April 12 – May 3, 2024. The sample size is 4,164 registered voters. The sample was recruited through Cint’s Lucid Marketplace, employing quota sampling to maximize representativeness. Respondent-level weights were applied in two stages: first, sampling weights were applied to account for oversamples by design; second, post-stratification weights were applied to account for remaining observable sample imbalances on age, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, nativity, census region, and party ID. The margin-of-error is $\pm 1.52\%$ (with 0.95 confidence).

Immigration policy platform experiment

To test the effects that different immigration policy platforms might have on voter attitudes and preferences, respondents were randomized in one of four immigration policy platform experimental conditions with $p = 0.25$:

- Group 1 (*Bipartisan compromise*): Voters received information that described the Biden administration’s immigration policies as articulated in the bipartisan border security bill of early 2024
- Group 2 (*Shift to the right*): Voters received information that the Biden administration was adopting Trump-style immigration policies
- Group 3 (*Leaning in on Democratic policies*): Voters received information about Biden’s immigration policies from his 2020 platform, including a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants
- Group 4 (control group): No information was provided to voters

The full text of the information provided to survey respondents can be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

The dependent variables in this experiment are:

- Approval of Joe Biden’s immigration policies (5-point Likert scale of approval, recoded for analysis as a binary variable with 1 = strongly or somewhat approve, 0 otherwise)
- Presidential vote intent (coded as 1 if the respondent intends to vote for Joe Biden, 0 otherwise)
- Preference intensity for their vote choice (continuous measure coded as -1 if the respondent strongly prefers Donald Trump and +1 if the respondent strongly prefers Joe Biden)

Analytical approach

The dependent variables were measured both early in the survey and after respondents received the informational treatment, making this a within-subject design.

Treatment effects are estimated using the difference-in-differences estimator (modeled with ordinary least squares regression). Treatment effects should thus be interpreted as the average post-treatment change in respondent preferences relative to the control group.

Dependent variable: approval of Biden immigration policies

Question: Please tell us whether you approve or disapprove of Joe Biden's policies on immigration.

Democrats

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	27.5	29.8
Somewhat approve	34.8	33.2
Neutral	16.3	16.9
Somewhat disapprove	13.8	13.2
Strongly disapprove	7.6	6.9

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	22.9	23.3
Somewhat approve	36.3	40.1
Neutral	20.4	19.9
Somewhat disapprove	10.6	12.2
Strongly disapprove	9.8	4.5

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	24.1	45.8
Somewhat approve	35.2	35.4
Neutral	15.9	10.0
Somewhat disapprove	15.0	4.9
Strongly disapprove	9.8	3.9

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	28.4	25.3
Somewhat approve	28.0	35.9
Neutral	24.2	25.8
Somewhat disapprove	10.9	9.3
Strongly disapprove	8.6	3.7

Democrats' pre- and post-treatment mean approval of Biden immigration policies, by treatment group:

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.623	0.630	0.007	-0.040
Shift to the right	0.593	0.634	0.041	-0.006
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.593	0.812	0.219	0.172
Control group	0.564	0.612	0.047	0.000

Question: Please tell us whether you approve or disapprove of Joe Biden's policies on immigration.

Independents

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	11.3	12.3
Somewhat approve	17.3	32.1
Neutral	22.5	25.0
Somewhat disapprove	17.8	14.8
Strongly disapprove	31.1	15.9

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	5.1	9.1
Somewhat approve	20.4	26.6
Neutral	19.6	23.3
Somewhat disapprove	18.7	19.5
Strongly disapprove	36.2	21.5

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	8.2	19.9
Somewhat approve	12.7	24.8
Neutral	25.0	21.5
Somewhat disapprove	16.7	12.4
Strongly disapprove	37.5	21.3

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	6.8	7.1
Somewhat approve	15.7	23.4
Neutral	18.5	22.2
Somewhat disapprove	18.3	19.6
Strongly disapprove	40.7	27.7

Independents' pre- and post-treatment mean approval of Biden immigration policies, by treatment group:

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.286	0.443	0.157	0.077
Shift to the right	0.255	0.357	0.102	0.022
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.209	0.447	0.239	0.158
Control group	0.225	0.305	0.080	0.000

Question: Please tell us whether you approve or disapprove of Joe Biden's policies on immigration.

Republicans

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	1.8	12.3
Somewhat approve	5.2	32.1
Neutral	7.4	25.0
Somewhat disapprove	13.2	14.8
Strongly disapprove	72.3	15.9

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	3.3	3.8
Somewhat approve	7.9	21.8
Neutral	5.4	19.5
Somewhat disapprove	11.4	12.7
Strongly disapprove	71.9	42.2

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	1.7	2.8
Somewhat approve	5.5	13.5
Neutral	8.9	13.7
Somewhat disapprove	14.3	22.6
Strongly disapprove	69.6	47.4

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Strongly approve	4.3	3.1
Somewhat approve	4.7	6.3
Neutral	8.4	13.4
Somewhat disapprove	13.2	16.4
Strongly disapprove	69.5	60.9

Republicans' pre- and post-treatment mean approval of Biden immigration policies, by treatment group:

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.071	0.260	0.189	0.186
Shift to the right	0.112	0.256	0.144	0.141
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.072	0.163	0.090	0.087
Control group	0.090	0.094	0.004	0.000

Dependent variable: presidential vote intention

Question: If the 2024 presidential election were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were Joe Biden (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican)?

Democrats

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	86.9	86.8
Donald Trump (Republican)	6.3	7.0
Some other candidate	4.3	3.7
I would not vote	2.4	2.5

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	81.5	83.5
Donald Trump (Republican)	8.0	7.7
Some other candidate	8.1	6.7
I would not vote	2.3	2.0

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	82.7	84.3
Donald Trump (Republican)	9.0	9.9
Some other candidate	7.1	4.2
I would not vote	1.2	1.6

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	85.9	88.1
Donald Trump (Republican)	5.6	5.7
Some other candidate	8.0	5.6
I would not vote	0.5	0.5

Democrats' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (coded 1 if respondent intends to vote for Joe Biden, 0 otherwise)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.869	0.868	-0.001	-0.023
Shift to the right	0.815	0.835	0.020	-0.002
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.827	0.843	0.016	-0.006
Control group	0.859	0.881	0.022	0.000

Question: If the 2024 presidential election were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were Joe Biden (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican)?

Independents

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	38.8	42.7
Donald Trump (Republican)	32.7	31.0
Some other candidate	22.6	21.6
I would not vote	5.9	4.6

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	42.9	44.1
Donald Trump (Republican)	33.4	29.8
Some other candidate	19.0	21.4
I would not vote	4.7	4.7

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	37.7	41.2
Donald Trump (Republican)	35.6	35.6
Some other candidate	20.4	16.6
I would not vote	6.2	6.6

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	39.7	43.9
Donald Trump (Republican)	35.8	33.3
Some other candidate	20.8	19.3
I would not vote	3.8	3.5

Independents' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (coded 1 if respondent intends to vote for Joe Biden, 0 otherwise)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.388	0.427	0.040	-0.003
Shift to the right	0.429	0.441	0.012	-0.031
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.377	0.412	0.035	-0.008
Control group	0.397	0.439	0.043	0.000

Question: If the 2024 presidential election were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were Joe Biden (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican)?

Republicans

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	5.8	7.3
Donald Trump (Republican)	90.3	87.8
Some other candidate	3.8	4.5
I would not vote	0.1	0.4

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	8.6	10.2
Donald Trump (Republican)	86.6	86.6
Some other candidate	4.3	1.9
I would not vote	0.5	1.2

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	7.8	7.4
Donald Trump (Republican)	88.0	86.5
Some other candidate	4.2	5.0
I would not vote	0.0	1.1

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Joe Biden (Democrat)	5.6	6.9
Donald Trump (Republican)	85.9	84.9
Some other candidate	6.7	6.7
I would not vote	1.8	1.5

Republicans' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (coded 1 if respondent intends to vote for Joe Biden, 0 otherwise)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.058	0.073	0.016	0.003
Shift to the right	0.086	0.102	0.016	0.003
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.078	0.074	-0.004	-0.017
Control group	0.056	0.069	0.013	0.000

Dependent variable: preference intensity for vote choice

Question: How would you characterize your support for [Joe Biden/Donald Trump]?

- Very strong, I've decided / Strong, I probably won't change / Somewhat strong, I might still change / Not too strong, I probably will change}

Democrats

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	53.6	55.2
Biden: Strong	24.0	21.9
Biden: Somewhat strong	8.4	8.3
Biden: Not too strong	0.9	1.4
Other	6.7	6.2
Trump: Not too strong	0.5	0.8
Trump: Somewhat strong	2.1	2.7
Trump: Strong	1.4	1.1
Trump: Very strong	2.4	2.4

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	50.5	50.9
Biden: Strong	20.7	20.5
Biden: Somewhat strong	8.7	10.7
Biden: Not too strong	1.6	1.5
Other	10.4	8.8
Trump: Not too strong	0.9	0.4
Trump: Somewhat strong	2.7	1.9
Trump: Strong	2.5	3.5
Trump: Very strong	1.9	1.8

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	49.9	54.4
Biden: Strong	21.1	18.7
Biden: Somewhat strong	10.0	10.2
Biden: Not too strong	1.7	1.0
Other	8.3	5.8
Trump: Not too strong	0.4	1.3
Trump: Somewhat strong	3.9	3.7
Trump: Strong	2.4	1.7
Trump: Very strong	2.2	3.1

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	48.3	48.9
Biden: Strong	24.1	22.4
Biden: Somewhat strong	12.0	14.1
Biden: Not too strong	1.5	2.7
Other	8.5	6.1
Trump: Not too strong	1.1	0.6
Trump: Somewhat strong	1.8	2.1
Trump: Strong	1.8	1.8
Trump: Very strong	0.9	1.3

Democrats' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (recoded as continuous measure with -1 = very strong support for Donald Trump and +1 = very strong support for Joe Biden)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.715	0.713	-0.001	-0.004
Shift to the right	0.655	0.664	0.009	0.007
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.651	0.672	0.021	0.019
Control group	0.694	0.696	0.002	0.000

Question: How would you characterize your support for [Joe Biden/Donald Trump]?

- Very strong, I've decided / Strong, I probably won't change / Somewhat strong, I might still change / Not too strong, I probably will change}

Independents

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	15.6	15.1
Biden: Strong	13.8	16.4
Biden: Somewhat strong	8.6	11.3
Biden: Not too strong	0.8	0.0
Other	28.5	26.3
Trump: Not too strong	1.2	3.2
Trump: Somewhat strong	10.4	7.9
Trump: Strong	11.0	8.6
Trump: Very strong	10.2	11.3

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	12.7	16.1
Biden: Strong	16.7	16.3
Biden: Somewhat strong	11.7	11.1
Biden: Not too strong	1.8	0.6
Other	23.8	26.1
Trump: Not too strong	1.4	0.5
Trump: Somewhat strong	10.0	5.9
Trump: Strong	9.7	10.7
Trump: Very strong	12.2	12.7

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	16.5	16.5
Biden: Strong	8.2	14.2
Biden: Somewhat strong	11.1	8.6
Biden: Not too strong	1.9	2.0
Other	26.6	23.2
Trump: Not too strong	0.0	1.1
Trump: Somewhat strong	8.3	8.4
Trump: Strong	12.2	9.1
Trump: Very strong	15.0	17.0

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	16.6	17.1
Biden: Strong	10.2	11.9
Biden: Somewhat strong	11.9	14.4
Biden: Not too strong	0.9	0.5
Other	24.6	22.8
Trump: Not too strong	0.6	0.0
Trump: Somewhat strong	12.9	13.4
Trump: Strong	12.4	11.0
Trump: Very strong	9.9	8.9

Independents' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (recoded as continuous measure with -1 = very strong support for Donald Trump and +1 = very strong support for Joe Biden)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	0.066	0.105	0.039	-0.009
Shift to the right	0.066	0.102	0.035	-0.014
Leaning in on Democratic policies	0.003	0.036	0.032	-0.016
Control group	0.047	0.096	0.049	0.000

Question: How would you characterize your support for [Joe Biden/Donald Trump]?

- Very strong, I've decided / Strong, I probably won't change / Somewhat strong, I might still change / Not too strong, I probably will change}

Republicans

"Bipartisan compromise" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	2.1	1.9
Biden: Strong	2.1	2.8
Biden: Somewhat strong	1.5	2.2
Biden: Not too strong	0.1	0.4
Other	3.9	4.9
Trump: Not too strong	1.4	0.0
Trump: Somewhat strong	10.2	10.7
Trump: Strong	24.0	20.9
Trump: Very strong	54.7	56.1

"Shift to the right" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	2.3	1.2
Biden: Strong	2.5	4.8
Biden: Somewhat strong	3.8	4.2
Biden: Not too strong	0.0	0.0
Other	4.8	3.1
Trump: Not too strong	2.0	0.8
Trump: Somewhat strong	8.3	12.2
Trump: Strong	23.6	20.9
Trump: Very strong	52.6	52.8

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	1.8	1.3
Biden: Strong	2.5	2.7
Biden: Somewhat strong	1.9	2.3
Biden: Not too strong	1.5	1.1
Other	4.2	6.1
Trump: Not too strong	1.0	0.1
Trump: Somewhat strong	14.7	13.6
Trump: Strong	22.2	25.5
Trump: Very strong	50.1	47.2

Control group:

Response	Pre-measure (%)	Post-measure (%)
Biden: Very strong	3.1	2.4
Biden: Strong	1.6	1.6
Biden: Somewhat strong	1.0	2.4
Biden: Not too strong	0.1	0.5
Other	8.5	8.2
Trump: Not too strong	2.0	1.6
Trump: Somewhat strong	13.5	12.2
Trump: Strong	23.4	24.9
Trump: Very strong	47.0	46.2

Republicans' pre- and post-treatment presidential vote intention, by treatment group (recoded as continuous measure with -1 = very strong support for Donald Trump and +1 = very strong support for Joe Biden)

Treatment group	Mean (pre)	Mean (post)	Change	Change (relative to control grp)
Bipartisan compromise	-0.737	-0.719	0.018	0.012
Shift to the right	-0.689	-0.678	0.011	0.004
Leaning in on Democratic policies	-0.693	-0.685	0.008	0.001
Control group	-0.671	-0.664	0.006	0.000

Difference-in-differences regression results

Given that we have a pre- and post-measure for each dependent variable, we estimate the treatment effects for each informational treatment using the difference-in-differences estimator, modeled with ordinary least squares regression. Results from this regression are presented below:

	DV: Approval of Biden Immigration Policies			DV: Intent to vote for Biden			DV: Preference Intensity of Presidential Vote		
	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Ind.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Ind.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Ind.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>
<i>Bipartisan compromise</i>	-.040 (.050)	.077 (.055)	.186 *** (.036)	-.023 (.020)	-.003 (.027)	0.003 (.012)	-.004 (.022)	-.009 (.026)	.012 (.021)
<i>Shift to the right</i>	-.006 (.048)	.022 (.044)	.141 *** (.036)	-.002 (.023)	-.031 (.030)	0.003 (.012)	.007 (.025)	-.014 (.027)	.004 (.024)
<i>Leaning in on Democratic policies</i>	.172 *** (.042)	.158 *** (.044)	.087 ** (.033)	-.006 (.023)	-.008 (.025)	-0.017 (.012)	.019 (.025)	-.016 (.023)	.001 (.022)

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Notes:

Robust standard errors reported in parentheses, clustered at the respondent level.

Appendix: Text of informational treatments

"Bipartisan compromise" informational treatment:

Last week, the US Center for Research on Immigration Policy, a non-partisan and independent research center, released the following analysis:

What's in Biden's Immigration Legislation?

Deportations:

- President Joe Biden has promised more deportations, supporting legislation that gives more powers for the President to order expedited deportations.

Restricting Asylum:

- President Biden has requested the authority to shut down the Southern border – including to people seeking asylum – when more than 8,500 people cross in one day or when there is a daily average of more than 5,500 people crossing in any one week. President Biden has also supported tougher standards for assessing whether someone is eligible to claim asylum in their initial interview with the Department of Homeland Security.

Border Wall:

- President Biden's immigration bill included authorization to fund additional construction of a border wall.

"Shift to the right" informational treatment:

Last week, the US Center for Research on Immigration Policy, a non-partisan and independent research center, released the following analysis:

Biden Moves Closer to Trump-Era Immigration Policies

Deportations:

- In recent campaign speeches on immigration, Donald Trump has promised to put in place “the largest deportation operation in American history,” including the creation of large camps to hold undocumented immigrants before they're deported. President Joe Biden has also promised more deportations, supporting legislation that gives more powers for the President to order expedited deportations.

Restricting Asylum:

- During his presidency, Donald Trump put in place “Title 42,” which allowed border patrol agents to expel anyone crossing the border, even if they were seeking asylum in the US, with the effect of shutting down the Southern border. President Biden has requested the authority to shut down the Southern border – including to people seeking asylum – when more than 8,500 people cross in one day or when there is a daily average of more than 5,000 people crossing in any one week. President Biden has also supported tougher standards for assessing whether someone is eligible to claim asylum in their initial interview with the Department of Homeland Security

Border Wall:

- Building a wall on the US's southern border was a centerpiece of Donald Trump's immigration plans. President Biden's immigration bill included authorization to fund additional construction of a border wall.

"Leaning in on Democratic policies" informational treatment:

Last week, the US Center for Research on Immigration Policy, a non-partisan and independent research center, released the following analysis:

Reviewing Biden's Immigration Plans from the 2020 Election

As the 2024 election campaign gets underway, it's worth reviewing President Biden's immigration platform from the 2020 campaign:

- Working with Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The centerpiece of this reform would be to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US when they were children (also known as DREAMers)
- Ending the previous administration's policies of family separation, where children were separated from their parents when they were apprehended by Border Patrol agents after crossing the Southern border
- Ending construction of the border wall promised by the previous administration, and replacing it with more high-tech border security measures
- Allowing more visas for legal immigration, including family-based and work-based visas, as well as humanitarian visas such as those for refugees