



Public Opinion About the Border, at the Border

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Executive Summary

To better understand the attitudes and preferences that border residents have on border policies, the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego surveyed 2,750 voters across the four southwestern border states—Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. The survey was fielded from October 8 to October 22. The margin of error is +/- 2.1%. For more, see methodology section.

The data show that the majority of registered voters across the four southwestern border states—Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas—disapprove of the way that the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The results also reveal a general lack of trust in the Border Patrol agency, which includes: lack of trust that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people; lack of trust that Border Patrol officials will keep border residents safe; and lack of trust that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses.

Moreover, registered voters in the southwestern border states generally prefer policies opposite to those of the current administration. These policies include: alternatives to detention for families seeking refuge in the U.S.; placing unaccompanied minors caught attempting to cross the border illegally into the care of child welfare specialists, not border or immigration enforcement officials; providing aid to migrants in distress (e.g., food and water) rather than criminally prosecuting those who provide aid to migrants in distress; investing more in making ports of entry more efficient rather than spending more on border security; and admitting asylum seekers into the U.S. in order to ensure their safety rather than making asylum seekers wait in Mexico.

When it comes to spending, whereas the majority of registered voters across the four southwestern border states oppose additional federal spending on border walls and fencing, the results are mixed when it comes to additional federal spending on hiring more Border Patrol agents.

Lastly, the results show that just over 3 out of 10 have been stopped and questioned about their citizenship status at an interior border checkpoint.

Main Findings

Disapproval of How the President is Handling Issues at the Border

- The data show a net 19.6% disapproval rating of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border. 36.7% “strongly approve” or “approve” of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border. However, 56.3% “strongly disapprove” or “disapprove” of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border

Lack of Trust in Border Patrol

- Only 1 out of 3, or 33.1%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people equally
- Just over 4 out of 10, or 40.7%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials will “keep you and your family safe”
- Less than 3 out of 10, or 28.6%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses

Border Policy Preferences

- Over 6 out of 10, or 63.2%, say finding alternatives to immigration detention for families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S. comes closest to their views
- Over 2 out of 3, or 67.1%, say placing unaccompanied children who are caught attempting to cross the border illegally into the care of child welfare specialists, not border or immigration enforcement officials, comes closest to their views
- Over 8 out of 10, or 83.1%, say providing aid such as food and water to people in distress, including to migrants who are attempting to cross the border illegally, comes closest to their views
- Approximately 6 out of 10, or 59.9%, say investing in making ports of entry at the U.S.-Mexico border more efficient, such as adding more vehicle lanes and pedestrian walkways, modernizing technology, and adding more staff to reduce wait times, comes closest to their views
- Nearly 6 out of 10, or 58.6%, say those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., including women and children, should be allowed to enter the U.S. in order to ensure their safety while their asylum case is pending, comes closest to their views

Powers of Border Patrol

- Just under a majority, 47.9%, “strongly support” or “support” decreasing the 100-mile border zone and limiting the region where Border Patrol officials are able to stop, question, and search people to the actual border
- Over 3 out of 4, or 77.7%, “strongly support” or “support” requiring Border Patrol officials to have reasonable suspicion and probable cause before stopping and searching individuals in the interior of the U.S.
- A majority, 52.2%, “strongly support” or “support” prohibiting Border Patrol officials from racially profiling individuals

Spending on the Wall and Border Patrol Personnel

- After being told about existing border infrastructure and the diversion of federal funds, nearly 6 out of 10, or 58.0%, “strongly oppose” or “oppose” additional federal spending to build more border walls and fencing
- After being told about the number of Border Patrol agents and the difficulties in hiring more agents, nearly half, or 48.4%, “strongly oppose” or “oppose” additional federal spending to hire more Border Patrol agents

Border Residents and Border Patrol Checkpoints

- Over 3 out of 10, or 31.1%, have been stopped and questioned about their U.S. citizenship at an interior Border Patrol checkpoint

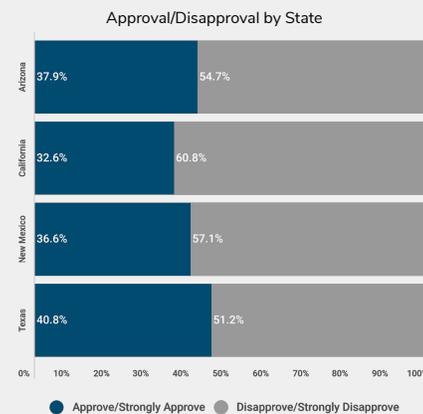
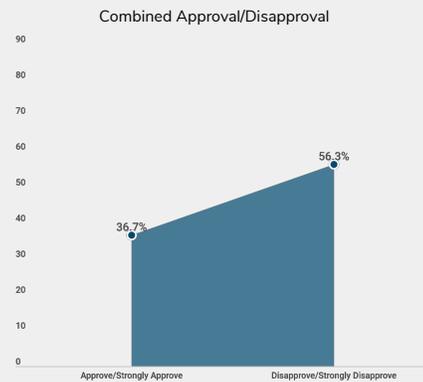
Core Values at the Border

- 87.9% “strongly agree” or “agree” that the federal government should be subject to strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements. Using a survey experiment, the data show that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, or CBP, is not exempt from these strong preferences
- 92.9% “strongly agree” or “agree” that all people have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Using a second survey experiment, we see that this percentage drops to 77.2% when we include language that states this right applies to all people regardless of their immigration status. In other words, there is a statistically significant decrease. However, this still means that over 3 out of 4 “strongly agree” or “agree” that the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness applies to all people regardless of immigration their status

Majority Disapprove of the Way the President is Handling Issues at the U.S.-Mexico Border

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border?”

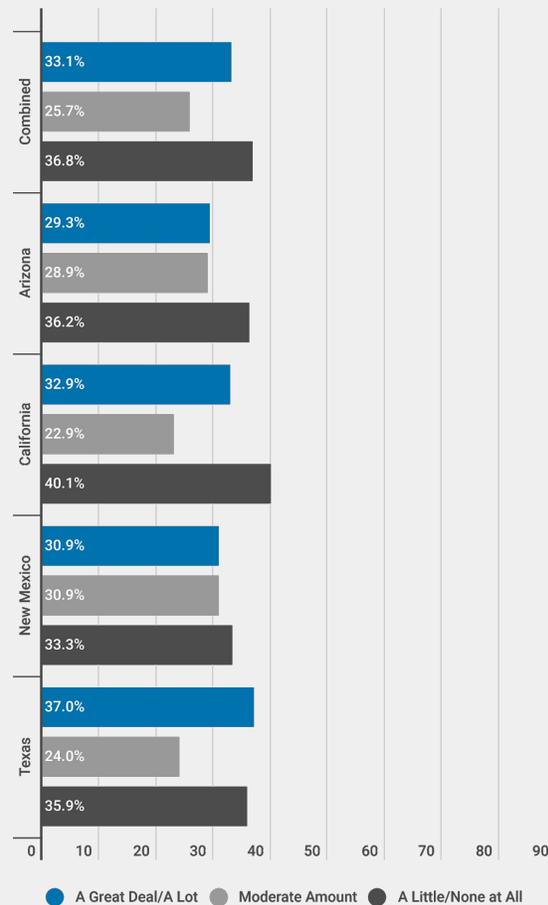
- The data show a net 19.6% disapproval rating of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border
- 36.7% “strongly approve” or “approve” of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border
- 56.3% “strongly disapprove” or “disapprove” of the way the president is handling issues at the U.S.-Mexico border
- Net disapproval is largest in California (-28.2%), followed by New Mexico (-20.5%), Arizona (-16.8%), and Texas (-10.4%)



Few Trust Border Patrol Officials to Protect the Rights and Civil Liberties of all People Equally

“How much trust do you have that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people, this includes border residents as well as migrants, equally?”

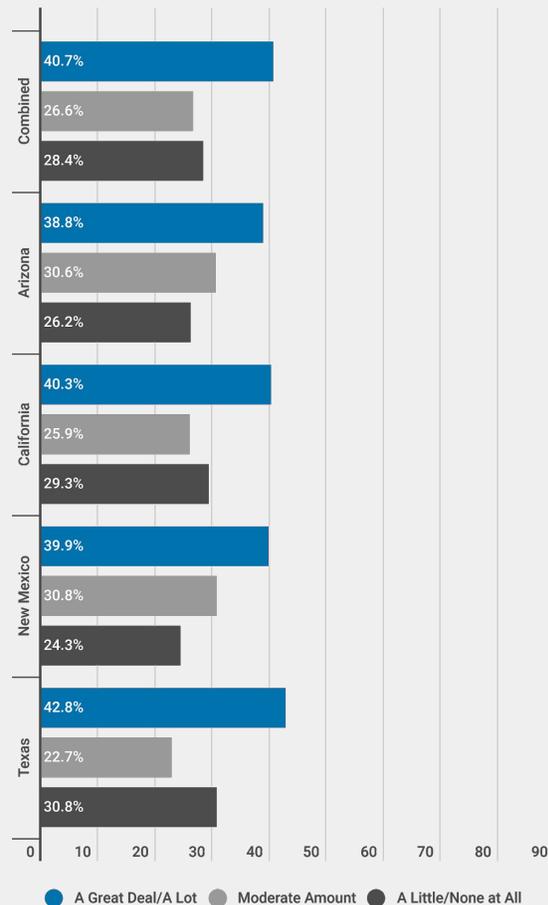
- Only 1 out of 3, or 33.1%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people equally
- In contrast, 36.8% trust only “a little” or “none at all” that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people equally
- In every state but Texas, the percentage of registered voters who trust only “a little” or “none at all” is greater than the percentage of voters who trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials will protect the rights and civil liberties of all people equally



Fewer Than Half Trust That Border Patrol Officials Will “Keep You and Your Family Safe”

“How much trust do you have that Border Patrol officials will keep you and your family safe?”

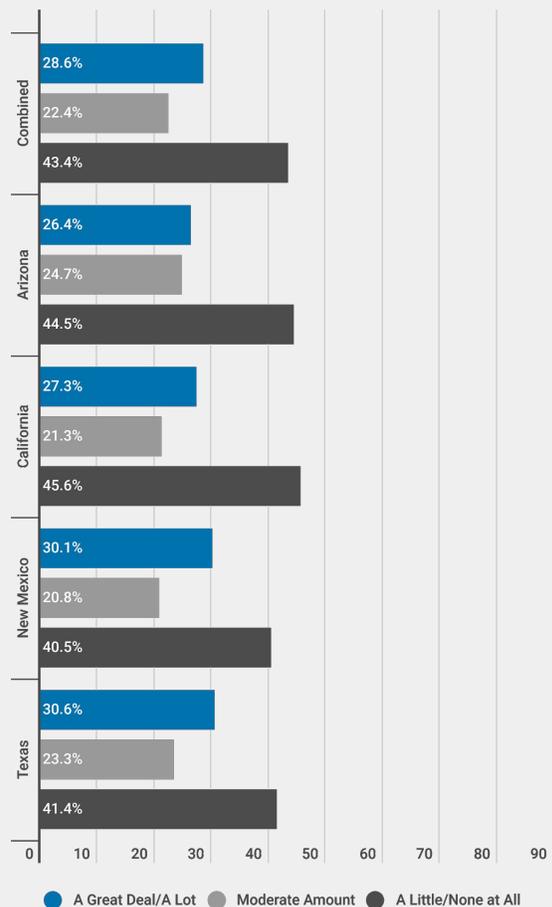
- Just over 4 out of 10, or 40.7%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials will “keep you and your family safe”
- In contrast, just under 3 out of 10, or 28.4%, trust only “a little” or “none at all” that Border Patrol officials will “keep you and your family safe”
- Among the four southwestern border states, registered voters in Texas have both the most trust (42.8% trust a “great deal” or “a lot”) and the least trust (30.8% trust only “a little” or “none at all”) that Border Patrol officials will “keep you and your family safe”



Few Trust that Border Patrol Officials who Abuse Their Authority Will be Held Accountable for Their Abuses

“How much trust do you have that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses?”

- Less than 3 out of 10, or 28.6%, trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses
- In contrast, 43.4% trust only “a little” or “none at all” that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses
- In every state, the percentage of registered voters who trust only “a little” or “none at all” is greater than the percentage of voters who trust “a great deal” or “a lot” that Border Patrol officials who abuse their authority will be held accountable for their abuses



Majority Prefer Alternatives to Detention for Families Seeking Refuge in the U.S.

Immigration Detention

- Over 6 out of 10, or 63.2%, say finding alternatives to immigration detention for families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S. comes closest to their views
- In contrast, 36.8% say detaining all individuals if they are caught attempting to cross the border illegally, including families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., comes closest to their views

Which comes closest to your views?	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“All individuals should be held in immigration detention if they are caught attempting to cross the border illegally, this includes families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S.”	36.8%	36.3%	35.5%	35.3%	39.6%
“We should find alternatives to immigration detention for families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S.”	63.2%	63.7%	64.5%	64.7%	60.4%

Questions randomized within block; order of statements randomized within question

Over 8 out of 10 Prefer Providing Aid to People in Distress, Including to Migrants Attempting to Cross the Border Illegally

Providing Aid to Migrants in Distress

- Over 8 out of 10, or 83.1%, say providing aid such as food and water to people in distress, including to migrants who are attempting to cross the border illegally, comes closest to their views
- In contrast, just 16.9% say criminally prosecuting individuals who provide aid such as food and water to migrants who are attempting to cross the border illegally, even if they are in distress, comes closest to their views

Which comes closest to your views?	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“We should criminally prosecute individuals who provide aid, such as food and water, to migrants who are attempting to cross the border illegally, even if the migrants are in distress”	16.9%	17.1%	17.2%	15.3%	17.5%
“We should provide aid, such as food and water, to people in distress no matter the circumstances, this includes migrants who are attempting to cross the border illegally”	83.1%	82.9%	82.8%	84.7%	82.5%

Questions randomized within block; order of statements randomized within question

Two-Thirds Prefer Placing Unaccompanied Children Into the Care of Child Welfare Specialists, Not Border or Immigration Enforcement Officials

Unaccompanied Children

- Just over 2 out of 3, or 67.1%, say placing unaccompanied children who are caught attempting to cross the border illegally into the care of child welfare specialists, not border or immigration enforcement officials, comes closest to their views
- In contrast, 32.9% say detaining unaccompanied children if they are caught attempting to cross the border illegally comes closest to their views

Which comes closest to your views?	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“When unaccompanied children are caught attempting to cross the border illegally, they should be held in immigration detention”	32.9%	30.5%	31.8%	33.6%	35.3%
“Unaccompanied children caught attempting to cross the border illegally should be placed into the care of child welfare specialists, not border or immigration enforcement officials”	67.1%	69.5%	68.2%	66.4%	64.7%

Questions randomized within block; order of statements randomized within question

Majority Prefer Investing in Making Ports of Entry More Efficient

Investing in Ports

- Approximately 6 out of 10, or 59.9%, say investing in making ports of entry at the U.S.-Mexico border more efficient, such as adding more vehicle lanes and pedestrian walkways, modernizing technology, and adding more staff to reduce wait times, comes closest to their views
- In contrast, approximately 4 out of 10, or 40.1% say investing more in border security at the U.S.-Mexico border, such as physical barriers, military equipment and technology, and more Border Patrol personnel, comes closest to their views

Which comes closest to your views?	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“We should invest in more border security at the U.S.-Mexico border, such as physical barriers, military equipment and technology, and more Border Patrol personnel”	40.1%	39.8%	34.4%	41.6%	46.5%
“We should invest in making ports of entry at the U.S.-Mexico border more efficient, such as adding more vehicle lanes and pedestrian walkways, modernizing technology, and adding more staff to reduce wait times”	59.9%	60.2%	65.6%	58.4%	53.5%

Questions randomized within block; order of statements randomized within question

Majority Prefer Admitting Asylum Seekers Into the U.S. to Ensure Their Safety

Admitting Asylum Seekers

- Nearly 6 out of 10, or 58.6%, say those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., including women and children, should be allowed to enter the U.S. in order to ensure their safety while their asylum case is pending, comes closest to their views
- In contrast, approximately 4 out of 10, or 41.4%, say those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., including women and children, should wait in Mexico or elsewhere outside the U.S. while their asylum case is pending, regardless of concerns about their safety, comes closest to their views

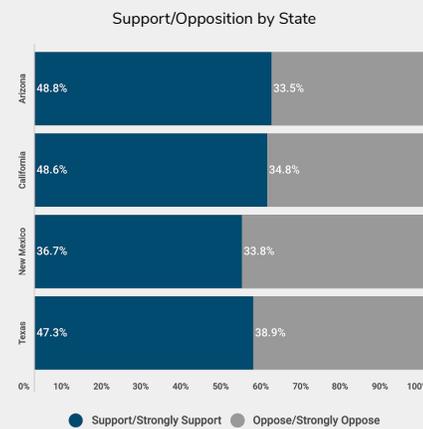
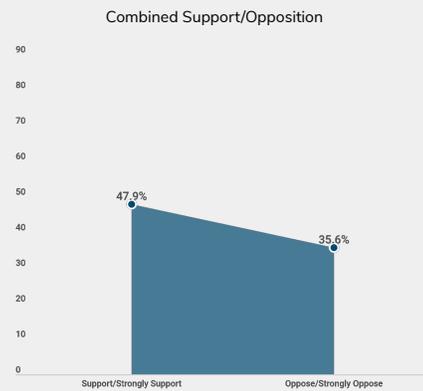
Which comes closest to your views?	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“Those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., including women and children, should wait in Mexico or elsewhere outside the U.S. while their asylum case is pending, regardless of concerns about their safety”	41.4%	38.9%	38.6%	42.7%	45.6%
“Those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the U.S., including women and children, should be allowed to enter the U.S. in order to ensure their safety while their asylum case is pending”	58.6%	61.1%	61.4%	57.3%	54.4%

Questions randomized within block; order of statements randomized within question

Near Majority Support for Decreasing the 100-Mile Border Zone

“... Would you support decreasing the 100-mile border zone and limiting the region where Border Patrol officials are able to stop, question, and search people to the actual border?”

- Just under a majority, 47.9%, “strongly support” or “support” decreasing the 100-mile border zone and limiting the region where Border Patrol officials are able to stop, question, and search people to the actual border
- In contrast, 35.6% “strongly oppose” or “oppose” decreasing the 100-mile border zone
- The differential in support/opposition is largest in Arizona (+15.3%), followed by California (+13.8%), Texas (+8.4%), then New Mexico (+2.9%)

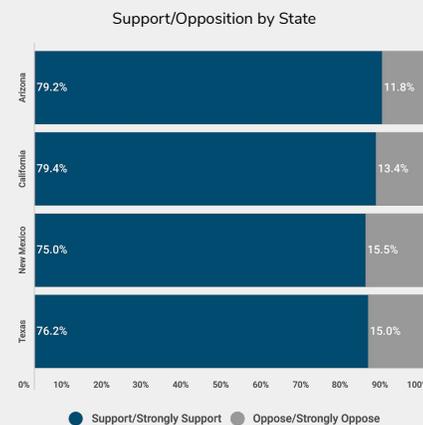
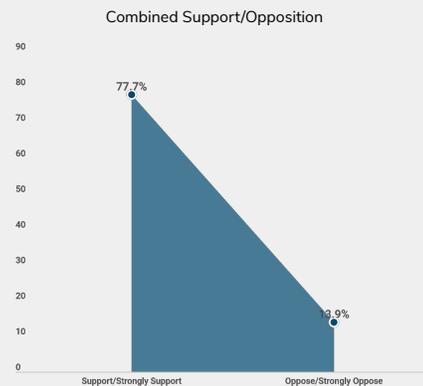


* Question was prefaced by the following: “I want to ask you about specific border proposals that Congress might consider. I’m going to read a brief statement. Please let me know if you would like me to repeat anything. Currently, the border region is defined in law as the area within 100 miles of a land or sea border, which includes major cities like Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami and encompasses two-thirds of the U.S. population. Within this zone, border authorities assert the power to stop, question and search people, including U.S. citizens, anywhere, anytime, and without a reason. They also assert the power to engage in racial and identity profiling in deciding who to stop. In places where there are more Border Patrol officials, like in the southern part of your state, more people are stopped going to school or work or home than they are for crossing the border.”

Over 3 out of 4 Support Requiring Border Patrol Officials to Have Reasonable Suspicion and Probable Cause

“... Would you support requiring Border Patrol officials—as is required in the Constitution—to have a reasonable suspicion before stopping individuals and to have probable cause before searching individuals inside the U.S.?”

- Over 3 out of 4, or 77.7%, “strongly support” or “support” requiring Border Patrol officials to have reasonable suspicion and probable cause before stopping and searching individuals in the interior of the U.S.
- In contrast, just 13.9% “strongly oppose” or “oppose” requiring Border Patrol officials to have reasonable suspicion and probable cause
- The differential in support/opposition is largest in Arizona (+67.4%), followed by California (+66.0%), Texas (+61.2%), then New Mexico (+59.5%)

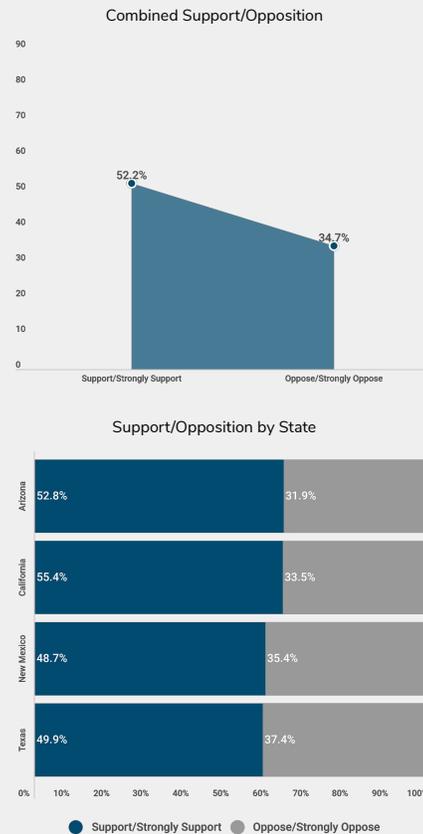


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Majority Support Prohibiting Border Patrol Officials From Racially Profiling Individuals

“... Would you support prohibiting Border Patrol officials from racial profiling individuals?”

- A majority, 52.2%, “strongly support” or “support” prohibiting Border Patrol officials from racially profiling individuals
- In contrast, 34.7% “strongly oppose” or “oppose” prohibiting Border Patrol officials from racially profiling individuals
- The differential in support/opposition is largest in California (+21.9%), followed by Arizona (+20.9%), New Mexico (+13.3%), then Texas (+12.5%)

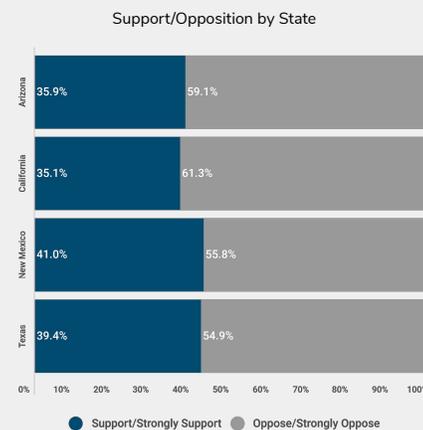
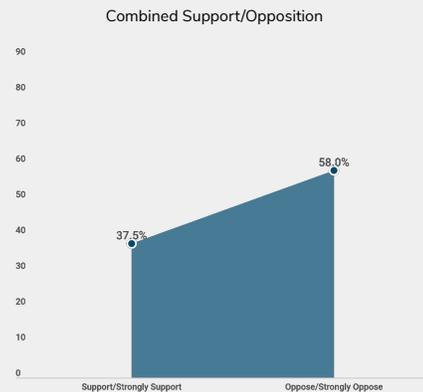


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Majority Oppose Additional Federal Spending to Build More Fencing Along the U.S.-Mexico Border

“We currently have roughly 700 miles of border walls and fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. In order to build more border walls and fencing, the Trump administration has diverted money from other federal government agencies, including the military, after Congress denied him the money. With this in mind, do you support additional federal spending to build more border walls and fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border?”

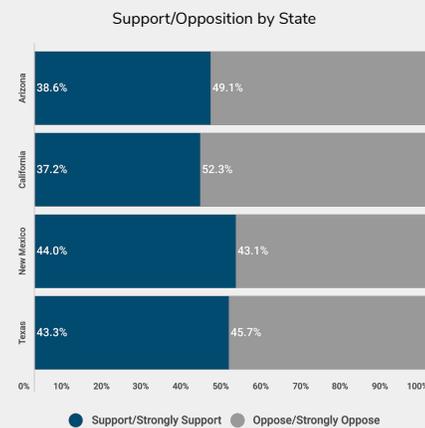
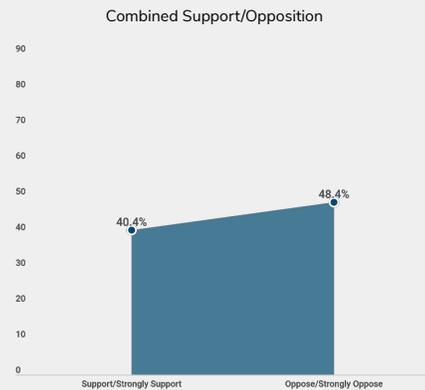
- After being told about existing border infrastructure and the diversion of federal funds, nearly 6 out of 10, or 58.0%, “strongly oppose” or “oppose” additional federal spending to build more border walls and fencing
- 37.5% “strongly support” or “support” additional federal spending to build more border walls and fencing
- The differential in support/opposition is largest in California (-26.2%), followed by Arizona (-23.2%), Texas (-15.5%), then New Mexico (-14.8%)



Nearly Half Oppose Additional Federal Spending to Hire More Border Patrol Agents

“We currently have nearly 20,000 Border Patrol agents and most are at the southern border. In 2017, nearly \$300 million was allocated to hire an additional 7,500 Border Patrol agents over a 5-year period. However, the Border Patrol has added only about a hundred new agents. Knowing this, do you support more federal spending, above what has already been given to Border Patrol, to hire more agents?”

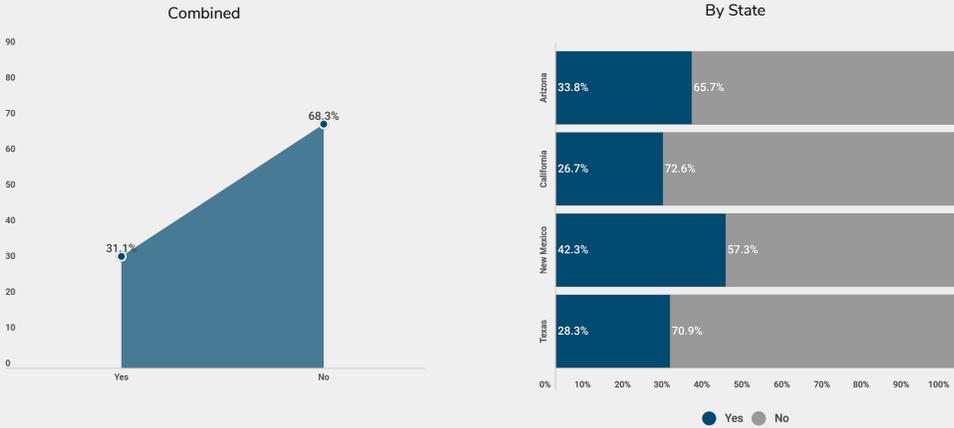
- After being told about the number of Border Patrol agents and the difficulties in hiring more agents, there is neither majority opposition nor majority support for hiring more Border Patrol agents
- Nearly half, or 48.4%, “strongly oppose” or “oppose” additional federal spending to hire more Border Patrol agents
- 40.4% “strongly support” or “support” additional federal spending to hire more Border Patrol agents
- The differential in support/opposition is largest in California (-15.1%), followed by Arizona (-10.5%), Texas (-2.4%), then New Mexico (+0.9%)



3 out of 10 Have Been Stopped and Questioned at Interior Border Patrol Checkpoints

“Have you been stopped and questioned about your U.S. citizenship at an interior Border Patrol checkpoint? For the purposes of this question, an interior Border Patrol checkpoint means being stopped by the Border Patrol anywhere inside the U.S. and not at a port of entry?”

- Over 3 out of 10, or 31.1%, have been stopped and questioned about their U.S. citizenship at an interior Border Patrol checkpoint
- By state, this ranges from a high of 42.3% in New Mexico to low of 26.7% in California



Large Majority Agrees That the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Agency Should be Subject to Strict Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight

Survey Experiment 1

- Voters were randomly assigned to one of the two statements below. In the control condition, voters were read a statement about the federal government being subject to strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements. In the treatment condition, voters were read the same statement, but with the additional text, “this includes agencies like the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, or CBP”
- 87.9% “strongly agree” or “agree” that the federal government should be subject to strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements. There is no statistically significant difference in agreement with this statement in the treatment condition ($p = .731$). In other words, CBP does not get a pass when it comes to strong voter preferences for strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements

% Agree/Strongly Agree	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“The federal government should be subject to strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements”	87.9%	87.9%	89.4%	85.3%	87.9%
“The federal government should be subject to strict transparency, accountability, and oversight requirements, this includes agencies like the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency, or CBP”	87.5%	84.6%	90.8%	83.3%	87.6%

Large Majority Agrees That all Persons Have Inalienable Rights Regardless of Immigration Status

Survey Experiment 2

- Voters were randomly assigned to one of the two statements below. In the control condition, voters were read a statement about all persons having the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In the treatment condition, voters were read the same statement, but with the additional text, “this includes all people regardless of their immigration status”
- 92.9% “strongly agree” or “agree” that all people have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When the text, “this includes all people regardless of their immigration status,” is included in the statement, this percentage drops to 77.2%. This is a statistically significant decrease ($p < .001$)
- However, this still means that over 3 out of 4, or 77.2%, “strongly agree” or “agree” that the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness applies to all people regardless of immigration status

% Agree/Strongly Agree	All	AZ	CA	NM	TX
“All persons have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”	92.9%	92.9%	91.8%	92.7%	94.7%
“All persons have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, this includes all people regardless of their immigration status”	77.2%	75.7%	84.3%	77.9%	69.3%

Methodology

This survey was fielded from October 8 to October 22. The total sample size is 2,750. $n = 500$ in Arizona; $n = 1,000$ in California; $n = 450$ in New Mexico; and $n = 800$ in Texas. Registered voters were identified using voter files obtained from L2. All surveys were conducted via phone. Landlines and cell phones were sampled in the proportion they appeared in each state's voter file. Approximately 30% landlines and 70% cell phones in Arizona; approximately 50% landlines and 50% cell phones in California; approximately 40% landlines and 60% cell phones in New Mexico; and approximately 40% landlines and 60% cell phones in Texas. Landlines were called via random digit dialing and cell phones were manually dialed. All calls were made by America's Survey Company (ASC). ASC was instructed to verify the identity of the voter and the address of the voter before proceeding. The raw data were weighted to reflect the registered voter population of for each southwestern border state by party, by age group (18-34, 35-55, 55+), by sex, and by education (less than bachelor's degree or bachelor's degree or higher). The margin of error across all four southwestern border states is $\pm 2.1\%$. The margin of error for Arizona is $\pm 4.4\%$. The margin of error for California is $\pm 3.1\%$. The margin of error for New Mexico is $\pm 4.6\%$. The margin of error for Texas is $\pm 3.5\%$.

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