

Equis Key States Series: Immigration Memo

OVERALL TAKEAWAYS

In the months ahead of the midterm election, **immigration has consistently emerged as a top 3 issue among Latino voters**¹. Meanwhile President Joe Biden's handling of immigration has frequently earned him some of **his lowest issue approvals among Hispanics** across the states² in which Equis has regularly polled. In all these states except Pennsylvania³, Biden's net approval on immigration among Latino voters is underwater. This voter dissatisfaction appears to be driven by *both* Latinos who support creating a pathway to citizenship (the majority) as well as those who are concerned with security at the border.

As the year has progressed, **the state of the economy, and particularly, cost of living, has risen in salience as Latino voters' top issue, while immigration has taken somewhat of a back seat**. For example, 14% of Latino voters in Arizona cited immigration as their top issue in December, with 29% naming the economy. By June, only 7% cited immigration as their top priority while **52% mentioned the economy and cost of living**. Both immigration and the economy consistently prove to be where Biden performs worst among Latinos.

Latino voters often have multi-faceted views on immigration. Support for immigration reform and for border security are not necessarily an either/or – instead, many Latinos support both. In Arizona, for instance, 56% of Latino respondents⁴ said they support *both* increased funding for border security and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people living in the U.S.

That said, when faced with the choice, a **majority of Latino voters consistently prioritize creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants over strengthening border security**.

Some Latino voters are deeply disillusioned with the government's inaction on immigration reform. In focus groups conducted in recent months, we have consistently heard that voters feel like **it is a promise that politicians, namely Democrats, bring up every election cycle to court Hispanics, but that time and time again, they've failed to deliver on**. Latinos are

¹ "What would you say is the most important issue that you want the federal government in Washington to do something about?"

² States include Arizona, Nevada, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin, Georgia and Pennsylvania

³ This survey was conducted in June 2022

⁴ This survey was conducted in March 2022. 298 out of 400 respondents were asked about both border security and a pathway to citizenship.

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growing increasingly tired and distrustful of people in power—or who seek power— and their “empty promises” on immigration.

- “It'd be nice if somebody actually did something about it instead of just talking and brushing it aside.” -Ben, 31 y/o Mexican lean Dem, **Arizona voter**.
- “This government, just as the ones before, they’ve made promises but they do not fulfill any of them... they seek out the Latino vote but they don't deliver.” - Sandra, 36 y/o, Guatemalan, Trump voter, **Georgia voter**.

STATE-SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS

Arizona:

Immigration emerged as the second top issue for Latino voters (11%) in our August survey, but far behind the economy/cost of living (61%). In an earlier poll, conducted in June, almost half of Latinos in Arizona (49%) indicated they disapproved of Biden’s handling of immigration⁵.

Nearly 8-in-10 Latinos in the state support both providing “permanent legal status to Dreamers or undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children” (54% strongly favor) and providing “a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who pass a thorough vetting process and have no criminal records” (51% strongly favor).

These policies are popular even among Hispanics who self-identified as Republicans: 64% expressed support for a permanent status for Dreamers⁶, and 60% favored offering a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants⁷.

There was also strong support for increasing resources and personnel to secure the border (72% favor, 41% strongly). **This was true across political affiliations: 70% among Democrats, 69% among Independents, and 80% among Republicans.**

In that same poll, 7-in-10 Latino voters in Arizona favored **increasing “resources and personnel to process cases of asylum seekers humanely and efficiently”** (42% did so strongly). However, the measure generated more of a partisan gap: while 80% of Latino Democrats backed the policy, support was lower among Latino Republicans (58%) and Latino Independents (53%).

⁵ This survey was conducted in June 2022.

⁶ “Provide permanent legal status to Dreamers or undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S.as children.” Survey was conducted in March 2022.

⁷ “Provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.” Survey was conducted in March 2022.

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Overall, nearly 6-in-10 Latinos in Arizona support both increased funding for border security and creating a pathway to citizenship – in fact, a plurality of Hispanic voters regardless of party affiliation favor both proposals, including 65% of self-ID Democrats, 54% of Independents, and 46% of Republicans. Around 29% of Latino Republicans in Arizona only support increasing resources for border security.

Where we see more partisan divisions is in support for letting undocumented immigrants access certain government programs. Overall, nearly 6-in-10 Latinos favor allowing undocumented immigrants to sign up for health insurance plans offered by the government. When we break that down by party ID, we see that Latino Democrats (71% support) back this proposal at higher levels than Latino Independents (45% support) and Latino Republicans (34% support).

Similarly, while there was overall support (70%) for allowing non-citizen students who meet certain conditions to receive in-state college tuition⁸, the policy was more popular among Latino Democrats (86% favor) than among Latino Independents (58% favor) and Latino Republicans, who were split on the issue (50% favor).

Nevada

Immigration has consistently come up as a top priority for Nevada Latinos, but in the last few months, it has lost salience as more voters name rising inflation and other economic woes as their main concerns.

In our latest Nevada poll, conducted in August, **immigration ranked as the second most important issue for Latino voters (20%), behind cost of living and the economy (50%)**. Approximately, half of the 13% who mentioned it as their top issue referred to general immigration concerns, while only 6% specifically mentioned border control and security. Less than 4-in-10 (36%) Nevada Latinos approved of Biden’s handling of immigration in our August poll, a drop from 43% in December 2021.⁹

NV survey date	% that rank immigration as top issue	% that rank the economy/inflation as top issue
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⁸ “Allow non-citizen students to receive in-state college tuition if they attended school in Arizona for at least two years and graduated from high school in Arizona.”

⁹ 36% of Latinos in Nevada approve of Biden’s handling of immigration, according to an August survey.

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Dec. 2021	20%	31%
Feb. 2022	18%	49%
May 2022	14%	52%
August 2022	20%	50%

Messaging about Senator Catherine Cortez Masto's immigration record¹⁰, including support for DREAMers and immigration reform, worked the best among the pro-CCM messages tested (trafficking, healthcare, COVID, and economic messaging) in our February poll. Nearly 7-in-10 Latino voters said in our February survey that it made them more likely to vote for her. The message resonated particularly well with voters 18-29 (80%) and Spanish survey-takers (82%).

Florida

Biden's performance on immigration rates worse among Florida Latinos than in any other state from our polling series. Six-in-10 (62%) voters disapprove of his job handling the issue; that's around 11 percentage points worse than his overall disapproval as President, which stands at 52%¹¹.

Ron DeSantis fares better than Biden among Hispanics both in terms of immigration (46% approve, 47% disapprove) and in his overall rating as governor (50% approve, 46% disapprove).

Florida Latinos have consistently named immigration as one of their top issues: in December it ranked as their second top priority (13%), after the economy/cost of living (23%). Nevertheless, in our most recent poll conducted in June, immigration (7%) trailed far behind the economy/inflation (44%) as the most important matter voters want the federal government to do something about.

¹⁰ "Cortez Masto is working to repair our broken immigration system and protect hard working immigrant families. She cosponsored the DREAM Act and supports a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients. As the granddaughter of immigrants who came to the US from Mexico, Cortez Masto will always fight for immigrant communities in the Senate"

¹¹ This survey was conducted in June 2022

Texas

About half of Latino voters in Texas disapprove of both Biden's (50%)¹² and Gov. Greg Abbott's (55%)¹³ job handling immigration.

Immigration was the top issue in the state - mentioned by 25% of voters - in our baseline poll in February 2022. But in our most recent survey, conducted in July, immigration was behind gun control (28%), the economy/cost of living (23%) and reproductive rights (16%) as Latino voters' main concern. Around 20% of respondents listed immigration as their top issue, alluding to border security (12%) and immigration reform (8%).

TX survey date	% that rank immigration as top issue	% that rank the economy/inflation as top issue
Feb. 2022	25%	17%
May 2022	29% ¹⁴	33%
July 2022	20% ¹⁵	25% ¹⁶

In a poll conducted in May 2022, when given contrasting statements about offering in-state tuition to Texas high school students regardless of immigration status, over 5-in-10 Latino voters agreed with the proposal.¹⁷ About 27% chose the statement describing the measure as unfair.¹⁸

When asked in a February poll whether Congress should prioritize establishing a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants already in the U.S. or strengthening border security and enforcement of immigration laws, the majority of Latino voters in Texas (56%) favored a pathway to citizenship, including 78% of self-ID Latino Democrats, 52% of Independents and 31% of Latino Republicans . Only 3-in-10 Latinos believed the federal government should focus more on improving border security.

¹² This survey was conducted in Feb. 2022

¹³ This survey was conducted in May 2022

¹⁴ 15% immigration reform; 14% border security

¹⁵ 12% border security; 8% immigration reform

¹⁶ 12% general statement on the economy; 13% cost of living and housing

¹⁷ "Regardless of their immigration status, Texas high school students deserve an equal opportunity to go to college, including getting in-state tuition rates at Texas public colleges and universities."

¹⁸ "It is not fair for undocumented immigrants to get in-state tuition rates at Texas public colleges and universities while American citizens from other states are denied more affordable college tuition."

Georgia

Immigration has remained a top issue for Latino voters in Georgia throughout our three waves of polling this cycle. However, in our most recent wave (July/August) Hispanic voters named immigration, gun control/public safety, and women's rights/abortion at even levels for the first time—all below the economy and inflation which 35% named as their priority. Biden's net approval rating on immigration was at -10 in January, while our most recent survey shows his overall approval as President is at -13.

Governor Brian Kemp is also underwater with Latino voters on immigration: 55% of Latinos disapprove of his handling of the issue. In recent months, however, Hispanic voters' overall view of Kemp has improved. In May, his net approval was -12; that gap has reversed to +4.¹⁹ As of our latest poll, Latinos are split on Kemp's job rating as Governor.

When asked who they trust more on certain issues, a majority of Hispanic voters trust Democrats (54%) more than Republicans (45%) on immigration. Additionally, when presented with Warnock's²⁰ and Walker's²¹ stances on immigration, a strong majority (60%) of Latinos align with Warnock's position, with support being notable among women (66%) and self-ID Independents (67%).

North Carolina

In our latest round of polling in North Carolina, conducted in August, around 9% of Latino voters named immigration²² as their top issue, behind the economy/inflation/jobs (38%), education funding (19%) and reproductive rights (14%). In previous waves, immigration had come up as a top three issue.

NC survey date	% that rank immigration as top issue	% that rank the economy/inflation as top issue
Jan 2022	19%	30%

¹⁹ Most recent approval rating from July/August 2022

²⁰ Democrat Raphael Warnock believes the government must prioritize immigration reform. He supports providing a dignified path to citizenship for DREAMers and undocumented immigrants who meet certain conditions and expanding protected status for immigrants fleeing violence and persecution.

²¹ Republican Herschel Walker believes the government must prioritize securing our border to keep Americans safe and stop illegal immigrants, drugs, and criminals from coming into the country. He supports building a border wall and significantly increasing resources for Border Patrol.

²² Includes general sentiments about immigration, pro-immigration reform and anti-immigration statements.

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April 2022	16%	42%
June 2022	10%	49%
August 2022	9%	38%

Biden's net approval on immigration among Latino voters in North Carolina is -4 (41-45), lower than his overall approval overall of +9, but higher than his net approval on the economy, which stands at -22 (39-61).

When forced to choose whether they believe the federal government should prioritize establishing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented students already in the U.S. or border security and stronger enforcement, nearly 7-in-10 North Carolina Latinos favored a pathway to citizenship. Only 1-in-5 sided with border security and stronger enforcement.

In the Senate race, messaging that focuses on Ted Budd's stance on immigration, linking him to President Donald Trump's policies²³, proved to be effective among Latino voters in North Carolina: 60% said in a June poll that it raised serious doubts about him. The message did well particularly among younger Latino voters²⁴ (64% said it raised serious doubts) and undecided voters²⁵ (57% said it raised serious doubts).

Pennsylvania

In our baseline poll conducted in Pennsylvania²⁶, immigration emerged as the third top issue (13%), after the economy/inflation (33%) and crime and safety (14%). In our third poll conducted in August, the issue salience had dropped: only 6% of respondents mentioned immigration concerns as their top priority, including 3% who gave pro-immigration statements and 1% who called for border control.

Pennsylvania is the only state we're polling in where Biden's approval rating seems to be holding among Latino voters: in a June poll, 63% said that they approved of his job as President while 35% disapproved.

²³ "Ted Budd continues to criminalize immigrant communities and advocate for Donald Trump's racist policies. Instead of prioritizing the needs of North Carolinians, he's pushing to restart construction of the border wall and crack down on sanctuary cities."

²⁴ 18-34 year old voters make up about half of the Latino electorate in North Carolina

²⁵ Voters who indicated they were undecided in the U.S. Senate head-to-head or the Generic Congressional ballot

²⁶ This survey was conducted in Feb. 2022

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When asked what party they trusted more in handling the issue of immigration, twice as many Pennsylvania Latinos said the Democrats (44%) than the Republicans (22%). However, **some 2-in-10 Hispanics believe neither party handles the issue well.**

In terms of messaging, Josh Fetterman's stance on immigration reform²⁷, connected to his wife Giselle's personal story, resonated well with Hispanic voters: 8-in-10 considered the statement to be a very (58%) or somewhat (23%) convincing reason to vote for him. That said, other messages related to gun control and minimum wage performed better among Latinos.

Shapiro's messaging about accomplishments on immigration reform²⁸ as Attorney General was not as strong, with 58% of Latino voters finding this to be a very or somewhat convincing reason to vote for him. Among the eight messages presented in the survey, it was the worst performing statement.

Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, Latino voters' approval of Biden's job on immigration stood at 44% in March, about 12 points lower than his overall approval as President (56%). Similarly, while Governor Tony Evers' net approval among Latino voters on immigration is +12, it's still way below his overall net approval of +35.

Border security was the second top issue (10%) for respondents in our March survey, behind the economy/inflation (33%).

Pro-immigrant policies are overall very popular with Wisconsin Latinos. There is very strong support for providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants (80% favor, 60% strongly), as well as for in-state tuition for undocumented students (79% favor) and driver licenses for undocumented immigrants (75% favor). Even a majority of Latino Trump voters support a pathway to citizenship. However, there is also a majority support for "increasing resources and personnel to secure our borders" (59% support, 34% strongly).

²⁷ "John Fetterman supports the DREAM Act and advocates for comprehensive immigration reform. His wife, Gisele, came to the U.S. as a child after her family fled violence in Brazil and grew up undocumented. Fetterman believes that immigration is what makes America, America."

²⁸ "As Attorney General, Josh Shapiro shut down the Berks Family Detention Center where Trump's ICE agents detained entire families and he sued to block taxpayer spending on Trump's border wall." This survey was conducted in Feb. 2022

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Evers' messaging on immigration reform²⁹ resonated: about 6-in-10 Latino voters found the statement to be very or somewhat of a convincing reason to vote for him.

New Mexico

Around 8% of Latino voters in New Mexico named immigration as their top issue in our August baseline poll, tied with abortion/reproductive rights and crime/public safety, but behind education (12%) and the economy/inflation (32%).

Biden has a low approval rating on immigration (-13) coming in 13 points lower than his overall approval (0). That said, while around 47% of Latinos in New Mexico approve of his job as President, and 41% of his handling of the economy, **only about 39% have a favorable view of his handling of immigration.**

When presented with Michelle Lujan Grisham's³⁰ and Mark Ronchetti's³¹ contrasting positions on immigration, just over half of Latino (51%) voters sided with Lujan Grisham's while around 42% favored Ronchetti's message.

²⁹ "While Washington continues to do nothing to fix our broken immigration system, Governor Evers is pushing for common-sense legislation granting driver's licenses and in-state college tuition to undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin." Survey was conducted in March 2022.

³⁰ "Governor Lujan Grisham will address the humanitarian crisis at the border while prioritizing public safety and protecting New Mexican families from having to shoulder the burden caused by the federal government's failure to manage the flow of migrants."

³¹ "Mark Ronchetti will prioritize border security by ordering the National Guard to the border, cracking down on organized drug smuggling, eliminating the sanctuary policies for illegal immigrants, and doing away with stimulus checks for illegal immigrants."