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4/12/18

Latino Immigration

A recent survey of randomly selected North Carolina residents' attitudes towards Latino immigration in North Carolina revealed that although 52.5 percent of respondents agree that Latino immigrants today strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents, 70.3 percent of respondents support increased government spending for deportation of illegal immigrants and only 22.9 percent support increased spending to help immigrants adjust to living in America.

The survey was conducted March 21-April 1 by Daniel Riffe, a professor at the School of Media and Journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill. Riffe held a press conference on Wednesday to present the results of the survey.

“What are the consequences of the growth of one particular segment of the population?” Riffe asked during his prepared notes.

Riffe said that according to previous United States censuses, 5 percent of the U.S. population was “foreign-born” in 1970. This increased to 10 percent in 2004 and by 2007, 15 percent of the U.S. population was specifically Latino.

“There was an increase but it was not a uniform increase across ethnic groups,” Riffe said regarding immigration during this time.

North Carolina reported a 394 percent increase in Latino population between 1990 and 2000. Latinos made up 7 percent of the N.C. population in 2007, and although the national rate

of Latino immigration has slowed in the last two years, North Carolina's population grew 3 percent. The top countries of origin for N.C. immigrants in 2015 were Mexico (30.6 percent of immigrants), India (7.6 percent), Honduras (4.6 percent), El Salvador (3.6 percent), and Guatemala (3.3 percent), according to the American Immigration Council.

Riffe said that according to sociologist Robert E. Park, the "father of modern sociology" of the University of Chicago, possible consequences of this kind of influx in population can be classified along three major lines: antagonism, accommodation and assimilation.

Riffe said that it was not only Park's "theoretical consequences," but the "real consequences" of population changes such as tax increases, social services like healthcare, and growth within school systems that became the context for his survey.

The survey was conducted using random digit dialing of North Carolina residents and received a 34 percent response rate. The total number of respondents was approximately 529 and the sampling error was plus or minus 4.2 percent.

It was found that a majority of respondents agree that recent Latino immigrants in North Carolina are making the crime situation, the taxes, the quality of public schools and the general economy of the state worse. However, half of the respondents agree that Latino immigrants do not have much effect on the overall quality of life in the state.

Additionally, 81.6 percent of respondents believe that Latino immigrants today create a strain on social services and school systems, but 67.6 percent believe that the children of illegal immigrants in the U.S. should be permitted to attend public schools.

According to a 2012 Pew Research Center Survey, Mexican lawful immigrants have the lowest naturalization rate overall, although they remain the largest immigrant group in both

North Carolina and the United States. Generally, most other immigrants eligible for naturalization apply to become citizens, but Mexican-born green card holders cite language and personal barriers, lack of interest and financial barriers among the top reasons for choosing not to naturalize.

Riffe's survey found that 79.5 percent of respondents believe that the government should increase efforts to deport illegal immigrants and only 56.1 percent believe that the government should increase efforts to help illegal immigrants become legal citizens. Additionally, 70.3 percent of respondents support increased government spending for deportation of illegal immigrants although only 22.9 percent support increased spending to help immigrants adjust to living in America.

It was also found that 52.5 percent of respondents agree that Latino immigrants today strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents while 39.7 disagree.

When the Pew Research Center asked survey respondents if they believed that immigrants "strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents or burden the country by taking jobs, housing and health care," it found that these views vary starkly by political affiliation. Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, 82 percent think immigrants strengthen the country with their hard work and talents, and just 13 percent say they are a burden. Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, roughly as many (44 percent) say immigrants are a burden as say immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents (39 percent).

Although Riffe acknowledged that his survey respondents varied in demographics as well as in time spent viewing the news and in attention paid to immigration stories, he did not specify whether his sample was skewed in any way.