



Center for Social Science Research

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VIRGINIA RESIDENTS SHARPLY DIVIDED ON IMMIGRATION, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY STUDY FINDS

FAIRFAX, Va., June 29 2007—Virginians are deeply divided on immigration policies, according to a recent survey by researchers at George Mason University’s Center for Social Science Research. While many Virginians are reluctant to have the government provide additional services to undocumented immigrants, residents of the Commonwealth are sharply divided along racial, socio-economic and political lines.

The survey, done as part of the Mason Project on Immigration, was conducted during a three week period ending June 8, at a time of rising debate and news coverage of immigration policy. Topics covered were extensive and included such highly sensitive issues as government-sponsored day labor centers, Minutemen-like border patrol groups, crime, unemployment, quality of life and even terrorism.

“Given the difficulty that federal legislation has faced, we need to pay careful attention to perceptions at the state and local level,” said sociologist Steven Vallas, director of the center and the study’s designer. “This survey provides a timely portrayal of how the immigration debate has taken shape in the commonwealth and speaks to how the nation at large is sharply divided on the issue.”

Based on interviews with a random sample of 1,072 respondents drawn from around the state, the survey showed that when looking at race, African Americans emerge as the most deeply concerned ethnic group. Their concerns stem from a general fear that undocumented immigrants will undermine their positions within the economy and

society. Nearly half of all African Americans in the survey (49 percent), compared with only 29 percent of non-Hispanic whites, strongly agreed that undocumented immigration tends “to lower the wages and salaries of American workers.” [See tables following this release]

Responses were also sharply divided according to region. The survey showed that residents in metropolitan Northern Virginia and Charlottesville hold relatively accommodating views of undocumented immigration. Virginians living in regions that have faced greater economic hardship in recent years, such as the south-central and Piedmont regions, tend to be more deeply concerned about the consequences of immigration for their communities.

Political views were among the strongest determinants of respondents’ attitudes. 75 percent of the most conservative respondents believe that undocumented immigrants take jobs away from American workers, compared with only 32 percent of those who consider themselves strongly liberal.

Other findings include:

- Attitudes vary significantly by social class. In general, those with less education and lower household income tend to hold more negative views of illegal immigration. Those living in areas that have higher rates of unemployment or poverty also view illegal immigration more negatively.
- Most Virginians favor some kind of legal status for the undocumented: Forty percent of respondents support provisions that would grant illegal immigrants permanent residency, while another 38 percent favored guest worker status. Only one in five (20.7 percent) Virginians rejected any path toward legal status.
- Virginians favor tight controls over undocumented immigrants currently in the state. 73 percent of Virginians think that the police should check immigration status during routine activities such as traffic violation stops. A clear majority opposes allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at the colleges and universities within the Commonwealth.

- Political views sharply divide the state's population. The most conservative respondents in the study were three times more likely to agree strongly that undocumented immigration will “increase the danger of terrorism” (61 percent) than were the most liberal respondents (19 percent). Other items also reveal equally sharp ideological divisions.

“These findings indicate that divisions and debates about immigration are by no means limited to the halls of Congress and legislative bodies,” says Vallas. “Communities and social groups hold sharply different positions in relation to immigration, generating a divisive pattern that is not likely to wane anytime soon. Given the failure of federal immigration reforms with the U.S. Senate, the fault lines that cut across local counties and municipalities are likely to make themselves felt as the fall elections approach.”

Editor's note: More information about the survey's findings, detailed charts and graphs and the methodology of the survey can be found elsewhere at the center's web site:

www.cssr.gmu.edu

About the Study

This survey is based on telephone interviews of 1,072 English-speaking adult Virginia residents who were contacted during the three week period ending June 8, 2007.

Respondents were selected at random; cases were weighted by age, sex, and ethnicity to ensure proportional representation of all groups. The results carry a margin of error of plus or minus 3 per cent.

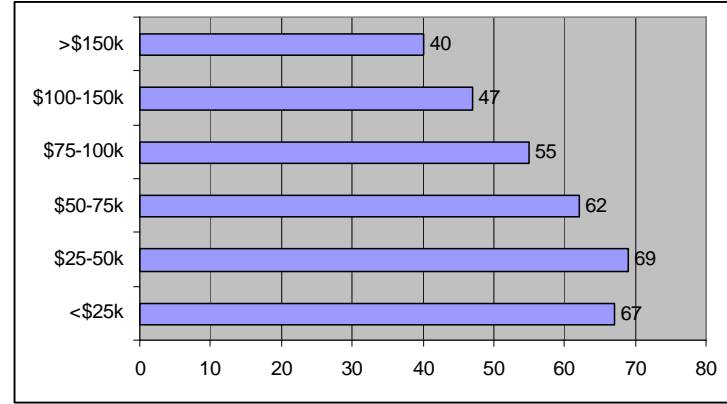
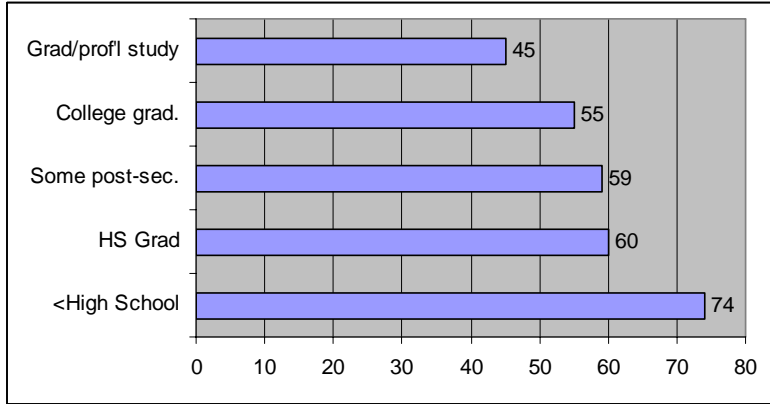
About the Center for Social Science Research

The Center for Social Science Research is an interdisciplinary research center that brings social science theories and methods to bear on some of the most pressing social, behavior, and political problems facing the region and nation at large. Studies employ a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods including survey research, focus groups, interviews, and analysis based on leading social indicators. Specific areas of research vary widely, ranging from studies on the needs of immigrant and refugee groups to research on youth, families, and community well-being. For more information, contact the Center's director, Steven Peter Vallas, PhD.

About George Mason University

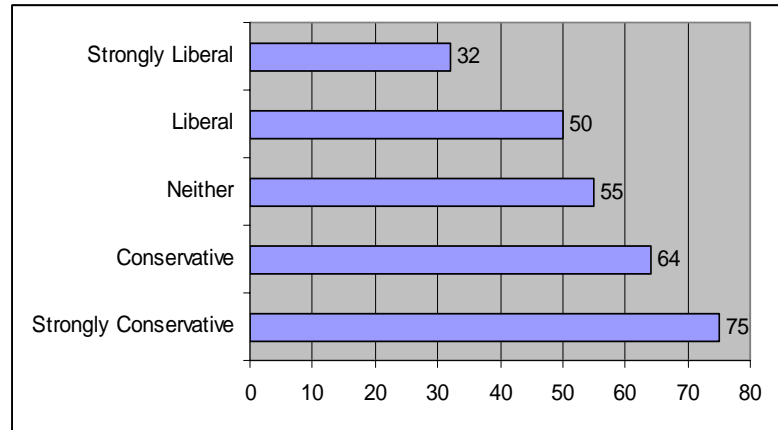
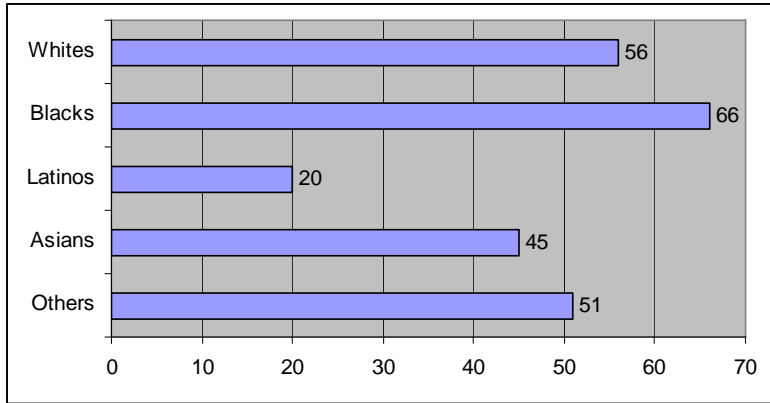
George Mason University, located in the heart of Northern Virginia's technology corridor near Washington, D.C., is an innovative, entrepreneurial institution with national distinction in a range of academic fields. With strong undergraduate and graduate degree programs in engineering, information technology, biotechnology and health care, Mason prepares its alumni to succeed in the workforce and meet the needs of the region and the world. Mason professors conduct groundbreaking research in areas such as cancer, climate change, information technology and the biosciences, and Mason's Center for the Arts brings world-renowned artists, musicians and actors to its stage. Its School of Law is recognized by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top 50 law schools in the United States.

“Undocumented immigrants take jobs away from American workers.”



Per cent who agree, by level of education.

Per cent who agree, by level of household income.



Per cent who agree, by race and ethnicity.

Per cent who agree, by political ideology.

