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Executive Summary

Public Opinions of Immigration in Florida

Introduction

Given the importance of undocumented immigration issues to the agricultural and natural resource sectors, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education (PIE Center) initiated a study to assess Floridians' attitudes, opinions, and knowledge around the issue of immigration. The survey explored five key areas: (1) importance of the immigration issue, (2) attitude towards undocumented immigrants, (3) government actions and benefits associated with immigration status, (4) effects of undocumented immigrants on the economy, and (5) whether/how E-Verify should be used to monitor employment eligibility.

Key Findings

Main highlights from the study include:

- Immigration is not considered as important of an issue to Floridians as the economy, healthcare, water and taxes, which respondents ranked higher than immigration in terms of importance.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents think that undocumented immigrants reduce good jobs for Americans and 42% think that undocumented immigrants fill jobs Americans don't want.
- Respondents consider immigration a more important issue at the national and state level than at the local level.
- Close to 44% of respondents know a recent immigrant and 39% report that the immigrant they know the best is someone they consider a friend.
- Seventy percent of respondents come into contact with immigrants that speak little or no English and 61% say this bothers them.
- Respondents report confusion on whether or not most immigrants in the U.S. are undocumented. Older respondents reported being less sure of documentation status of immigrants than younger respondents. Younger respondents reported believing there are more documented than undocumented immigrants in the United States.
- Respondents have low levels of confidence in political leaders to do what they consider the right thing with regards to immigration policy. Thirty-eight percent of respondents have "no confidence" in national leaders to do the right thing about immigration policy.
- Respondents have mixed feelings about what type of action the government should take regarding undocumented immigration.
 - Fifty-one percent say the U.S. should require undocumented immigrants to leave, but allow them to return and become citizens if they meet certain requirements.

- Thirty-four percent say the government should allow undocumented immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become U.S. citizens if they meet certain requirements over time.
- Fifteen percent say the U.S. should require undocumented immigrants to leave the U.S. and not allow them to return.
- Respondents were asked how they felt their personal economic opportunity would change if immigration rates (both undocumented and documented) remained the same. Sixty percent of respondents felt they would have less or a lot less economic opportunity. Only 12% of respondents thought they would have more economic opportunity if immigration rates remained the same.
- Fifty-five percent of respondents believe that immigrant parents must be legal residents for their newborn child to be a U.S. citizen.
- The majority of respondents believe undocumented immigrants should receive a public school education and medical care over other government benefits.
- Thirty percent of respondents reported knowing what E-verify is (an electronic employment verification system), and the majority think it should be required for all employers