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Executive Summary

Public Opinions of Immigration in Florida

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Introduction

Immigration, particularly undocumented immigration, is a key issue facing Florida and its agricultural and natural resource sectors. Understanding the attitudes, opinions and knowledge of the Florida public is an important piece of making better decisions about and educating on the issue of undocumented immigration. The Public Opinions of Immigration in Florida survey was taken by 503 Florida residents to examine their attitudes, opinions, and knowledge about undocumented immigration in Florida and the United States (U.S.).

Key Findings

- Respondents thought most undocumented immigrants in Florida work in agriculture and non-agricultural outdoor labor, instead of hospitality and indoor labor.
- While 25% of respondents believed most immigrants living in the U.S. are undocumented, 56% believed most workers in agriculture are undocumented.
- Only 60% of respondents knew that children born in the U.S. to undocumented immigrants were U.S. citizens.
- Forty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that children of undocumented immigrants should be allowed to attend college in their home state at in-state tuition rates. However, 49% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that children of undocumented immigrants should be eligible to receive federal education grant funding.
- Respondents had personal relationships with immigrants; 57% of respondents knew someone who had immigrated to the U.S. and 35% of those who knew an immigrant considered this person a friend.
- Immigration only ranked ninth out of 10 key Florida issues in terms of level of importance to respondents.
- Respondents had mixed feelings as to whether or not immigration is the biggest issue facing the U.S. or Florida today.
- Respondents had mixed feelings about undocumented immigrants and the economy. While 50% thought undocumented immigrants fill jobs Americans do not want, 69% of respondents thought undocumented immigrants are a burden on the economy.
- Fifty-five percent reported they had “no confidence” in their national political leaders to do what they think is right regarding the issue of immigration.

- When given three choices on what the government should do regarding undocumented immigration, 46% percent felt undocumented immigrants should be required to leave but be allowed to return later, while 43% felt undocumented immigrants should be allowed to remain and become citizens.
- Respondents believed undocumented immigrants currently qualify for more government benefits than they would preferably allow.
- Only 28% of respondents to the survey knew what E-Verify was and 77% were unsure whether Florida had implemented E-Verify.
- Only 28% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they would support E-Verify in Florida if unemployment increased, and only 27% agreed or strongly agreed they would support E-Verify in Florida if taxes increased.
- After being told some of the potential challenges of E-Verify for the agricultural sector, 62%, agreed or strongly agreed Florida should still require agricultural producers to use E-Verify.
- When given the Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al., 2000), respondents scored near the midpoint. This scale measured level of denial of racial dynamics, with a higher score indicating higher racial blindness. Respondents could score anywhere from 20 to 120, with a midpoint of 70. The average score of respondents was 75.51 ($SD = 14.47$).
- When given the Attitudes towards Illegal Aliens Scale (altered to read undocumented immigrants instead of illegal aliens) (Ommundsen & Larsen, 1997; Ommundsen & Larsen, 1999; Veer et al., 2004), respondents scored below the midpoint. This scale measured level of favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards undocumented immigrants. Respondents could have scored from 19 to 95 with a midpoint of 57. The average respondent's score was 43.54 ($SD = 14.47$), indicating a negative overall attitude towards undocumented immigrants.