

Texas GOP Takes A Step Backwards On Immigration

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Immigration is back on the front burner of the American political scene. Eric Cantor's surprising loss to newcomer Dave Brat relit the divide in the GOP over immigration reform, and new reports from the southern border on unaccompanied immigrant children have President Obama calling the state of affairs a "humanitarian situation." Wedged in between these two developments, the Texas Republican Party Convention convened earlier this month and dashed any hope of the state GOP softening its stance on immigration. The Texas GOP should reverse its strict anti-immigrant stance for the sake of both political strategy and long-term economic growth.

In 2012, a party policy known as the "Texas Solution" pushed to allow undocumented workers to hold jobs unfilled by U.S. citizens. Sadly, that policy was made null earlier this weekend as the party ushered in a platform which calls for more border security, no amnesty whatsoever, and ending in-state college tuition for illegal immigrants. Opposition to immigration is rationalized by the notion that immigrants cause a net drag on the economy.

As the Reason Foundation's Shikha Dalmia [notes](#), mass migration and modern cosmopolitan communities are a recent phenomenon. This historical reality makes the United States' immigration experiment such a fascinating and radical notion. Up until the 1920s, the U.S. did not pass substantive restrictions on allowing immigrants into the country. While the U.S. has severely restricted immigration since those initial quotas, a new poll sheds some light on the current status of immigration support in the country.

According to a new [poll](#) by the Public Religion Research Institute and Brookings Institution, 62 percent of Americans agree illegal immigrants should have a legal pathway to citizenship. In fact, a mere 19 percent support deportation. 58 percent, on the other hand, agreed the growing number of immigrants "strengthens American society," up four points from 2013. Only 37 percent say immigration harms society. Even respondents who believe illegal immigration hurts the economy are down ten percentage points.

These shifting attitudes comes on the heels of a recent Pew [poll](#) which found that the so-called Millennials generation, consisting of people under the age of 30, is the most ethnically diverse age group in American history and support immigration at record numbers. It's exciting to see

such pro-immigration sentiment expanding across the United States. Unfortunately, this dramatically contrasts with the image coming out of the Texas GOP.

Returning to last weekend's convention, the Texas GOP's newly adopted platform pulls the party to the right and further alienates it from the Hispanic community and growing pro-immigration sentiment across the U.S., especially amongst young people. Currently, there are nearly 10 million Hispanics in Texas. Some demographic estimates find Hispanics will constitute a plurality by 2020 and a majority by 2030 under current trends. In addition, 58 percent of Hispanic voters in Texas have friends or family members who are undocumented. The PRRI-Brookings poll found Republicans were three times more likely than Democrats to favor identifying and deporting illegal immigrants. These numbers present a frightening picture of the Republican party's political future in Texas.

Politics aside, academic evidence strongly suggests that immigrants are not a net drag on the economy, but to the contrary, are a benefit. Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute [finds](#) immigrants are 30 percent more likely to start a business than native-born Americans. In fact, immigrants have historically made more jobs than they supposedly take. First- or second-generation immigrants have founded more than 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. Immigrant college students are more likely to file for a patent than similarly educated natives. Immigrants help facilitate trade and investment links to their home countries, helping the U.S. remain competitive in the global marketplace. Immigrants have also created approximately 50 percent of Silicon Valley startups – including Google, Intel, eBay, and Yahoo.

Some Republicans like Paul Ryan and Rand Paul have begun flirting with softening their position on immigration reform. The Texas Republican Party should follow suit both for their own political-self interest and for the country's economic good.