

Immigration Hurts City, New Yorkers Say in Poll

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Body

With the largest wave of immigration since the turn of the century raising New York City's foreign-born population to 28 percent, most residents say there are too many immigrants in town and add that while most are law-abiding, they have made the city a worse place to live, a new poll has found.

At a time when several illegal immigrants have gone on trial in the bombing of the World Trade Center, the poll also found that most New Yorkers think illegal immigrants pose a serious threat of terrorism and believe that the trade center bombing would not have occurred if immigration controls had been tighter.

"Clearly New Yorkers are reacting to the World Trade Center bombing and the fact that illegals seem to be behind it," Douglas Muzzio, a political science professor at Baruch College who helped coordinate the survey of New Yorkers' views on immigration, said yesterday as the results were released.

The Empire State Survey -- a telephone poll of 1,203 New Yorkers interviewed from Sept. 10 to 26 -- was sponsored by the Empire Foundation, of Albany, and the Lehrman Institute, of New York, nonprofit organizations that study public policy. It was supervised by Dr. Muzzio and Richard Behn, an instructor at George Washington University's graduate school of political management.

'Intense Xenophobia'

The poll, with an estimated margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.8 percentage points, detailed startlingly negative attitudes on recent immigration in a city renowned for its international character and its history as a "melting pot" for immigrants.

Dr. Muzzio said the hostile attitudes were partly a response to the large wave of immigration -- an influx of 854,000 immigrants in the 1980's, which had the effect of raising the city's foreign-born population to 2.1 million, or 28 percent.

"This hostility is really nothing new," Dr. Muzzio said. "Historically, whenever a wave of immigrants hits the United States, it is met with intense xenophobia."

More than 63 percent of those surveyed said the number of recent immigrants had been too high. And while 69 percent said they believed immigrants were just as law-abiding as native-born Americans, the respondents by a two-to-one margin said that recent immigrants had made the city a worse place to live.

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Seen as Terrorist Threat

About 60 percent **said** immigrants had had a negative impact on the **city**, while 32 percent **said** the impact had been positive. The unfavorable view was held by a substantial majority of immigrants themselves (51 to 37 percent), as well as by American-born **New Yorkers** (66 to 25 percent), the **poll** found.

According to the survey, 55 percent believe that the United States is no longer a "melting pot" and that immigrants are far more likely to retain their national identities. An overwhelming 85 percent **said immigration** had been good in the past, while only 41 percent thought that was so today. About 43 percent **said immigration** should be decreased, while 13 percent **said** it should be increased.

The reaction to illegal immigrants was harshest. A majority of 55 percent saw such immigrants as a serious terrorist threat, and overwhelming numbers of **New Yorkers** -- 82 percent of the American-born and 68 percent of the foreign-born -- **said** they believed the trade center bombing in February would not have occurred if controls over **immigration** had been tighter.

Dr. Muzzio **said** other events involving immigrants had also contributed to the unfavorable views, including the grounding of the Golden Venture off Queens in June with a loss of 10 lives, when the smugglers' ship was carrying hundreds of Chinese as virtual indentured servants, and clashes between the police and Hispanic residents in Washington Heights.

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