

[Poll Shows Age Gap in G.O.P. on Immigration](#)

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Highlight: Younger Republicans are more in favor of establishing a path to citizenship for those immigrants in the country illegally.

Body

With [immigration](#) now a front-burner issue in the Republican presidential contest, a [new poll](#) shows a substantial [age gap](#) among Republican voters over whether there should be a path to citizenship for immigrants who are in the country illegally.

A majority - 57 percent -- of Republicans who are 65 and older say that tighter border security and tough law enforcement should be the only focus of [immigration](#) policy, with no path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, according to a [poll](#) released Tuesday by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, a nonpartisan group in Washington. Only about one-quarter of this group, or 24 percent, favor combining strict enforcement with a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

Among Republicans who are younger than 30, the [poll](#) found, 42 percent favor a combined approach of tough enforcement against illegal [immigration](#) with a path to citizenship, while 30 percent wanted only enforcement. Among these younger Republicans, another 26 percent said that opening a path to citizenship should be the [immigration](#) priority, with or without tougher enforcement.

The [poll showed](#) other differences. Among Republican voters who agreed with the [Tea Party](#), 52 percent favored a policy based only on tougher enforcement. Among Republicans who disagreed with the Tea Party or had no opinion, 36 percent wanted only enforcement, while 44 percent favored policies pairing enforcement with a path to citizenship.

According to the [poll](#), Republicans as a whole were about evenly divided between those who want only border security and tough enforcement - 43 percent - and those who want both enforcement and legalization for illegal immigrants- 41 percent. Only 14 percent of Republicans said the priority should be only on creating a path to citizenship.

The Pew findings seem to present a quandary for the Republican candidates, who have been working to frame the divisive issue of [immigration](#) to appeal to the largest number of primary voters. Older Republicans tend to be more engaged and turn out in larger numbers than younger voters, and though the Tea Party's popularity has [shown](#) a decline recently, its voters are active and remain influential within Republican ranks.

[Mitt Romney](#) has tuned his strategy to respond to these conservative voters, rejecting any path to citizenship for illegal immigrants as an amnesty that would be a magnet to draw more illegal [immigration](#). [Newt Gingrich](#) broke away from his rivals to say he would consider a path to legal status for some illegal immigrants who have lived in the United States for many years.

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The Pew **poll** appears to point to a silent but substantial minority of Republicans who could support a legalization program for illegal immigrants if it were combined with rigorous enforcement.

Despite persistent high unemployment and the intensifying debate over illegal **immigration**, views among the general public have not changed over the last year, the Pew **poll** found. A plurality of 43 percent favors combining enforcement with a path to citizenship; 24 percent said the priority should be on a path to citizenship alone; and about 29 percent want only enforcement with no legalization program.

The **poll** is based on telephone interviews conducted Nov. 9 to 14 among a national sample of 2,001 adults 18 or over.

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