



DEMOCRACY CORPS
CARVILLE ♦ GREENBERG

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

Date: February 7, 2014

To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville, and Erica Seifert

Inside the GOP:

Why Boehner is halting immigration reform

Just a year ago, the GOP appeared poised to re-brand itself as a more moderate and inclusive party. When the party released its “post-mortem” report on the 2012 election, one of the key findings was that the Republican Party “must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform.” And if you look at the numbers—demographic data and opinion surveys¹—you would say they were right.

So why did Speaker Boehner put a halt to any immigration reform yesterday? If you want to understand it, or fully capture the context for Rep. Labrador’s widely-reported belief that “it’s a mistake for us to have an internal battle in the Republican Party this year about immigration reform,” you need to get inside the base of the Republican Party.²

Support for immigration reform among all voters remains high—last week’s CNN/ORC poll found that 54 percent of adults nationwide would support a plan to allow those already in the country to become legal residents. Add to that employment, fluency in English, and back taxes, and support jumps to 81 percent.

But if you look at how this issue breaks down by party, just a third (34 percent) of Republicans say we should create a way to accommodate those already here. By contrast, 55 percent of Independents and 69 percent of Democrats believe there should be a way for those already here to become legal residents. The problem lies within the Republican Party—that same survey found just 29 percent of Tea Party supporters favor a path to legal residency.

Last summer, we conducted a major national survey and 6 focus groups among members of the Republican Party. What we found made us skeptical that House Republicans would take any action on immigration reform in the near future.

¹ <http://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>

² Over the last two months, we have been releasing initial findings from the first phase of research for Democracy Corps’ new Republican Party Project. This report details findings from six focus groups among Republican partisans—divided into Evangelicals, Tea Party adherents, and moderates. All participants indicated that they voted only or mostly for Republican candidates and were screened on a battery of ideological and political indicators. The groups were conducted in Raleigh, North Carolina (moderate and Tea Party), Roanoke, Virginia (Tea Party and Evangelical), and Colorado Springs, Colorado (moderate and Evangelical.)

10 G Street NE ♦ Suite 500 ♦ Washington, DC 20002

202.478.8300 tel ♦ 202.478.8301 fax

www.democracycorps.com



Why?

Moderate Republicans—who do support immigration reform—comprise just a quarter of the Republican Party. The core of the Republican Party (70 percent) is comprised of Evangelicals and Observant Christians, (47 percent) and Tea Party members (22 percent).³

The activists who will vote in primaries and in the election next November are dominated by Evangelical and Tea Party adherents—and they staunchly reject immigration reform.

The whole notion is anathema to Evangelical Republicans, where this hits at the core. As they told us in our focus groups last summer,

“Don’t come here and make me speak your language. Don’t fly your flag. You’re on American soil. You’re American.”; “You come to our country, you need to learn our language.” (Evangelical man, Roanoke).

Why should I put—press 1 if I want to speak in English? You know, everything—every politically correct machine out there says, “Press 1 for English. Press 2 for Spanish.” (Evangelical man, Roanoke)

And among Tea Party Republicans, immigration reform sounds like another plot to boost both the welfare rolls—and the rolls of the Democratic Party.

There’s so much of the electorate in those groups that Democrats are going to take every time because they’ve been on the rolls of the government their entire lives. They don’t know better. (Tea Party man, Raleigh)

Moderates are not only open to immigration reform, but welcome it as a smart economic policy and as the only practical way forward. As moderate Republicans in our focus groups told us,

“I mean I don’t think it’s feasible to say, send everybody home;” (Moderate woman, Raleigh)

I mean it’s a huge struggle to get here illegally so I think if they are here illegally...they are not leaving. And that means they are going to be putting a toll on our roads...taking up space in classrooms...so it would be nice if they were legal and they actually could be contributing to that tax circle...I just think getting them a path to that would be great. (Moderate woman, Raleigh)

³ In this survey, “Evangelical Republicans” are those who identify as Republicans, who do not characterize themselves as “moderate” or “liberal” and who call themselves “Evangelical.” Similarly, “Observant” refers to those who do not characterize themselves as “moderate” or “liberal,” who identify as Protestant or Catholic, and who attend church twice weekly or more often. Focus group participants were selected on the following characteristics: white, identify themselves as strong Republicans, vote only for Republicans in elections, and are registered to vote.



But these are not the constituents John Boehner is thinking about right now—nor should he be. He is listening to the anti-immigrant Tea Party members and Evangelicals – the real base of the Republican Party.