

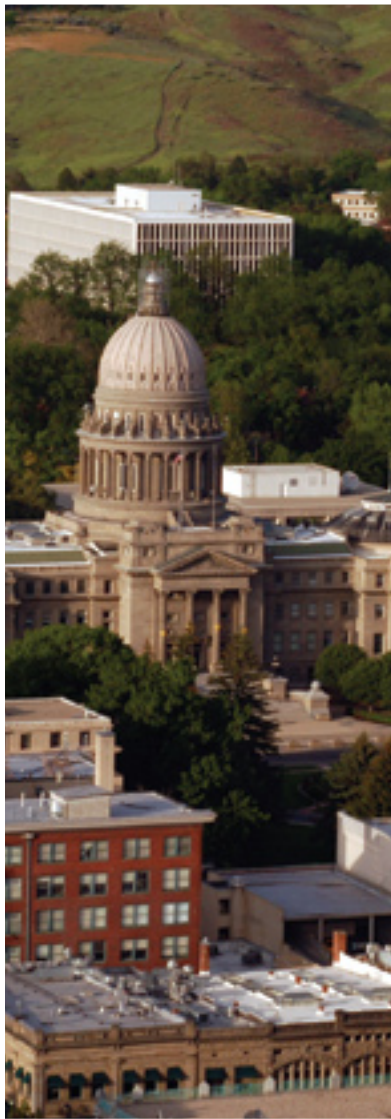


PUBLIC POLICY CENTER  
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOISE, IDAHO

P U B L I C P O L I C Y C E N T E R

## Immigration and the Public Policy Survey

A White Paper prepared by the Boise State University  
Public Policy Center



MAY 2010

<http://sspa.boisestate.edu/publicpolicycenter/>



# Immigration and the Public Policy Survey

A White Paper prepared by the Boise State University  
Public Policy Center

WHITE PAPER | MAY 2010

**Greg Hill, Ph.D.**

DIRECTOR, APPLIED RESEARCH PROGRAM  
PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY & ADMINISTRATION  
GREGHILL@BOISESTATE.EDU

**Andy Bourne**

GRADUATE STUDENT  
IN THE MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (MPA) PROGRAM



**DR. STEPHANIE WITT, DIRECTOR  
PUBLIC POLICY CENTER  
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

Public Affairs and Art West Building, Rm 128  
Boise State University  
Boise, ID 83725-1935  
208.426.1476  
208.426.4370 fax



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evidence suggests that public opinion has a significant and measurable impact on legislative, executive, and citizen interaction. The state of Idaho is no exception. In this white paper, we examine a sample of the opinions of Idahoans, as expressed in the Public Policy Survey, on the subject of immigration.

In the 18th and 19th Annual Idaho Public Policy Surveys, the survey sample was asked to respond to a number of questions concerning immigration in Idaho. Questions on the survey ranged from economic impacts to the quality of education to indigent medical care. Of the many benefits that the data offers, some of the not inconsequential benefits are an additional outlet through which citizens may express their opinions, and additional information provided for decision makers.

Generally, the information gathered from the survey is used discretely, year by year, to inform policy makers. In this white paper, we have taken a look at the immigration questions in the last two iterations of the survey and summarized the results.

The following is a list of findings:

- Idaho residents feel strongly that undocumented immigrants reduce the quality of education for Idaho children.
- Idahoans have indicated that they feel that counties should deny indigent medical care to undocumented immigrants.
- An English-only policy for the state of Idaho is a very popular concept for Idahoans.
- Stricter immigration policy is not likely to negatively affect the economy.

We offer some concluding thoughts at the end of the survey data presentation. Our sense is that the presentation of the perceptions of the public related to immigration is only part of the story. What is clearly missing is any secondary empirical analysis of, for instance, the measurable effects of illegal immigrants on school performance. What we seem to glean from this analysis is that there is much yet to be learned about immigration and its effects on Idaho and Idahoans.



## INTRODUCTION

In 2006 and 2007, the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Boise State University included a number of questions concerning illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants in its statewide survey of Idahoans in order to better understand the public's concerns and opinions. The survey is administered to a minimum of 500 Idaho citizens each year, with the data being weighted according to the proportion of the total state population within each of six geographic regions. These six geographic regions are the same regions into which the state is divided for administrative purposes by the Idaho Association of Counties. The regions are weighted in order to create a more representative sample of the population of Idaho.

While the numbers change slightly, the survey has found that Idaho's population adheres to recognizable trends. This white paper focuses on four particular questions which appeared on the Public Policy Survey during these two iterations. The questions appeared in the form of statements, with those surveyed being asked to respond whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, or are unsure. The questions are:

- » In your opinion, undocumented immigrants reduce the overall quality of education for Idaho children.
- » In your opinion, counties should deny indigent medical care to undocumented immigrants.
- » In your opinion, Idaho should adopt an English only policy for the state.
- » In your opinion, a stricter immigration policy will negatively impact Idaho's economy.

## IMMIGRATION ISSUES OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Illegal or undocumented immigrants are viewed in academic literature as either societal ills or societal boons, with strong arguments in both directions. Before each survey question and the survey results are displayed below, an argument based on the current literature is presented to better understand the concept and sphere of immigration issues.

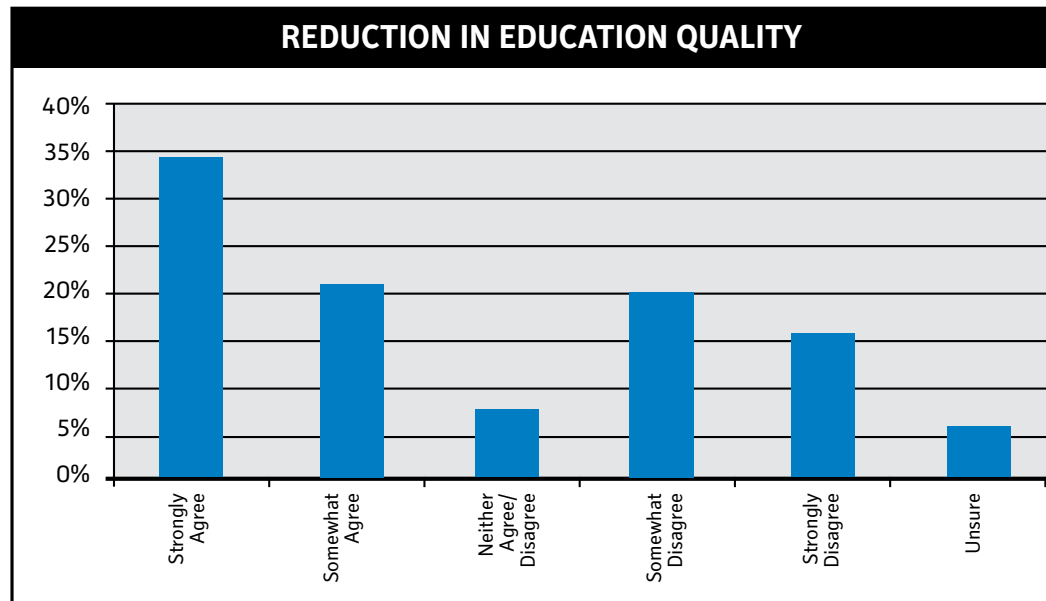
### UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

In terms of building educational "culture," Garcia (2001) posits that, based on theories of social stratification, there is a correlation between the cultural match of school and home. In other words, homes that emphasize education will see better results. However, this is not solely the burden of the home. Garcia argues that the absence of social resources can have a deleterious effect on the school, and may be one of the indicators to account for educational inequalities among Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

Hispanics, either of legal or illegal immigration status, struggle in the classroom. Meier and Stewart (1991) claim that Hispanic students are denied the same educational opportunities that their non-Hispanic counterparts enjoy. In fact, discrimination leads to, among other things, higher dropout rates among Hispanics. Others (Garcia 2001, Ochoa 2003) have argued that Latino students are treated as second-class citizens, and as such, deny them

many of the opportunities (such as access to core curriculum and access to college). Ochoa argues that denying Latinos these rights is an impediment to academic achievement and is in contradiction to the democratic ideal of equity among race and social class, indeed, an egalitarian society.

On the 19th Annual Public Policy Survey, respondents were asked the following statement: “In your opinion, undocumented immigrants reduce the overall quality of education for Idaho children.” The graph below documents the reactions of those polled.



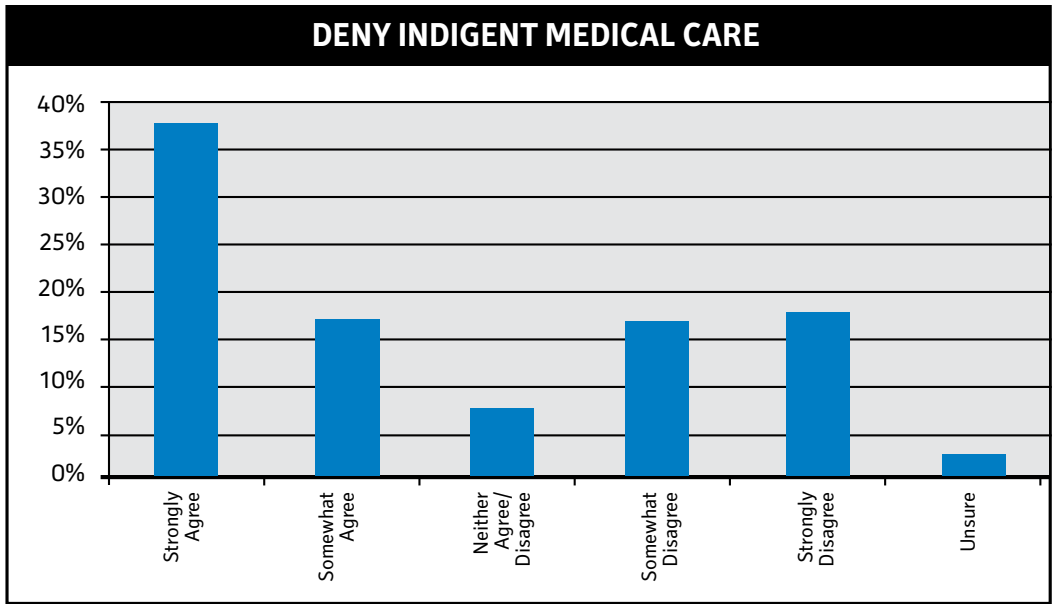
- » The majority of those surveyed answered that they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that undocumented immigrants reduce the overall quality of education for Idaho children, with 54%.
- » Approximately 35% of those surveyed indicated that they somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement that undocumented immigrants reduce the overall quality of education for Idaho children.
- » The graph of public opinion concerning education is very similar in layout to public opinion on indigent medical care.

### **UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

Proposition 187, among other things, seeks to deny health care to undocumented immigrants and their children. Pete Wilson, governor of California in the 1990’s sensed the growing unease in his state with relation to the growing immigrant population, and attempted to seize upon it politically by decrying the illegal immigrants as job stealers, burdens to hospitals and schools and tax evaders (Wroe 2008). Wilson’s opposition to illegal immigration and support for Proposition 187 in California was a significant pivot in the contemporary debate on the image and impacts of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Not all are convinced of Wilson’s “job stealer” construction of illegal

immigration, however. Chomsky (2007) argues that the only ones hurt by presenting false documentation to work in the formal economy are the immigrants themselves, as the appropriate taxes are still withheld from their paychecks while there is no recourse for the worker to claim them, and no access to the benefits they are paying for (i.e., social security or employment).

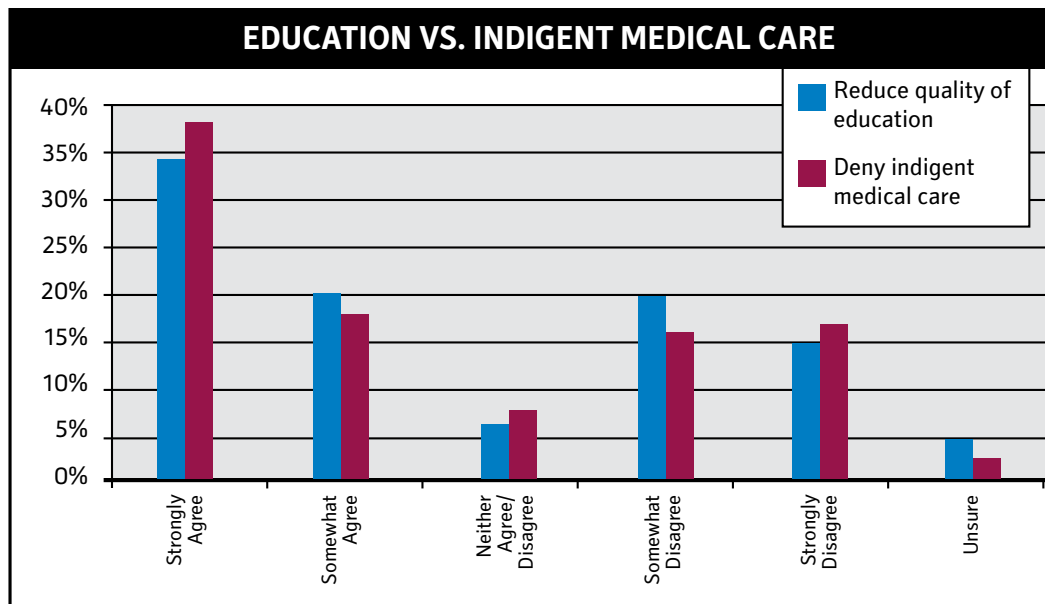
The statement, “In your opinion, counties should deny indigent medical care to undocumented immigrants” appeared on the 19th Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey. Responses from those surveyed are as follows:



- » Over 50% of the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that counties in Idaho should deny indigent medical care to undocumented immigrants.
- » Over 30% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement that counties should deny indigent medical care to undocumented immigrants.
- » The distribution looks similar to the distribution of the previous question concerning public opinion on education.
- »

The following graph compares the distributions of public opinion on education to the distribution on indigent medical care.

- » All of the indigent medical care responses are within 4% of the corresponding responses on education.
- » The only difference in the distribution is that more people strongly disagreed than somewhat disagreed with the statement that indigent care should be denied to undocumented immigrants. More people somewhat disagreed than strongly disagreed that undocumented aliens reduce the quality of Idaho education.



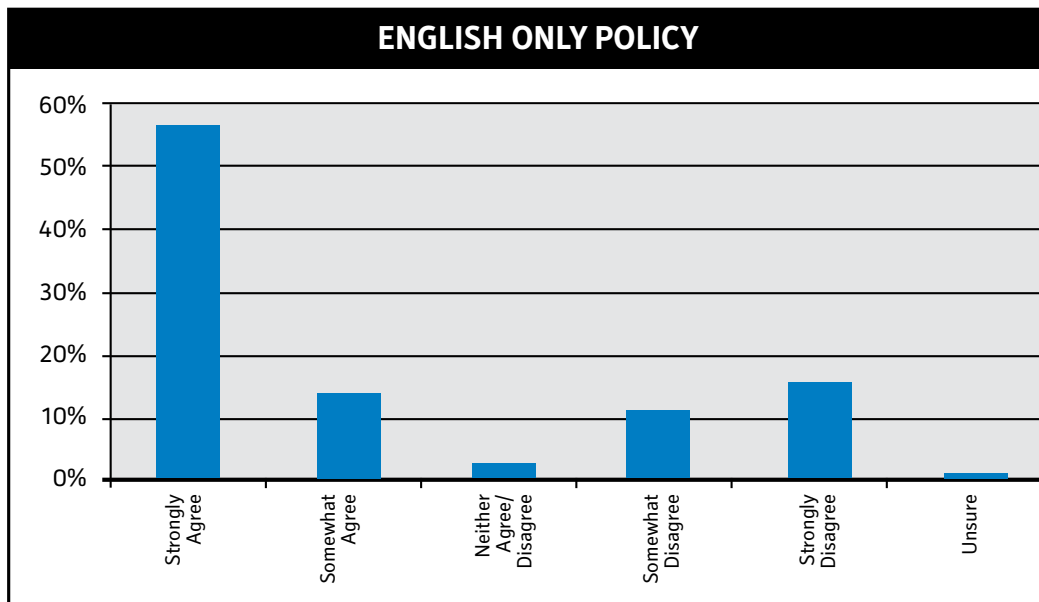
» Both graphs show that that at least 10% more respondents strongly agree than the next most common response, which is “somewhat disagree” in the education distribution and a tie between “strongly disagree” and “somewhat agree” in the indigent medical care distribution.

### ENGLISH ONLY LEGISLATION

Are the consequences of immigration always negative? From a political perspective, Taeku, Ramakrishnan, and Ramirez (2006) question what the consequences of immigration actually are. There has been little consensus through the years. Anti-immigration sentiments have been vocalized vis-à-vis citizen initiatives in California with Propositions 63 (declaring English as the official state language) and 187 (among other things, seeking to deny health care to undocumented immigrants and their children) and 227, which all but abolished bilingual education (2006, 4-5). In fact, there are 16 states that have enacted English-only legislation. The American Civil Liberties Union makes the following statement regarding English-only laws: “‘English Only’ laws vary. Some state statutes simply declare English as the “official” language of the state. Other state and local edicts limit or bar government’s provision of non-English language assistance and services. For example, some restrict bilingual education programs, prohibit multilingual ballots, or forbid non-English government services in general --including such services as courtroom translation or multilingual emergency police lines” (ACLU Briefing Paper). The 16 English-only states are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

The statement “In your opinion, Idaho should adopt an English only policy for the state” was included in the 18th Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey. The survey question does not specify what an “English-only” policy might be. The distribution from the survey responses is shown below.





- » Many more respondents strongly agreed with this statement than any other question in this white paper, with 56% strongly agreeing that Idaho should adopt an English only policy. Overall, 68 % of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed that Idaho should adopt an English only policy.
- » Approximately 27% of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement that Idaho should adopt an English only policy.

### IMMIGRATION POLICY AND THE ECONOMY

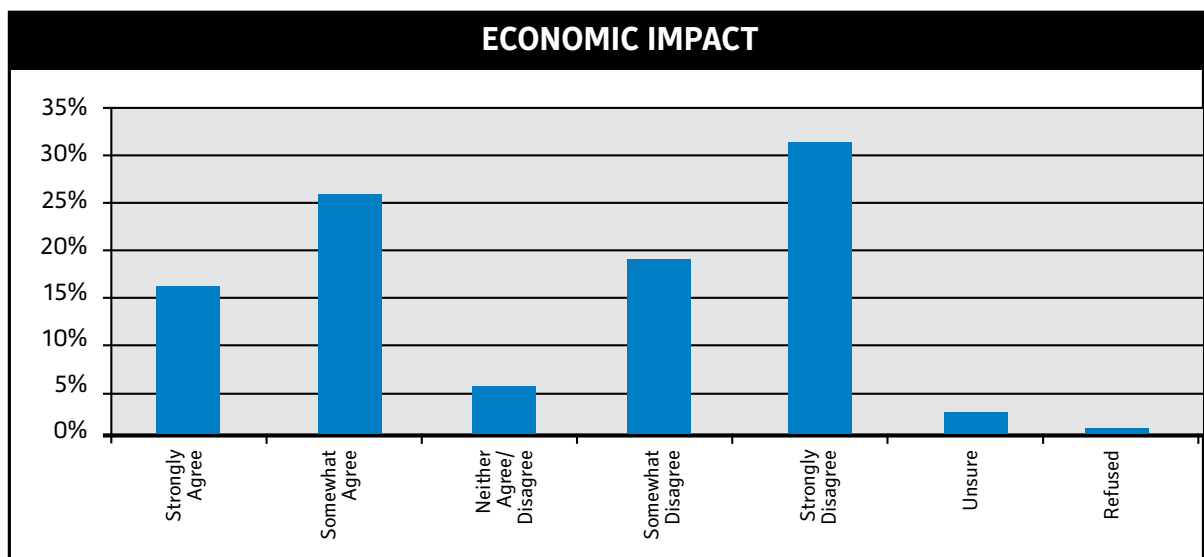
The rhetoric in favor of the case for closing borders and stopping the flood of illegal immigration is expansive. For instance, Steven Malanga, who writes for the online publication City-Journal, states, “These immigrants have picked our fruit, cleaned our homes, cut our grass, worked in our factories, and washed our cars. But they have also crowded into our hospital emergency rooms, schools, and government-subsidized aid programs, sparking a fierce debate about their contributions to our society and the costs they impose on it” (2006). In fact, Oklahoma has legislation (House Bill 1804, the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2007) targeting illegal immigration. In April, 2010, the state of Arizona passed legislation (Arizona Immigration Law SB 1070) authorizing police to check immigration status to anyone they suspect to be in the country illegally, which has only exacerbated the discussion and elevated the immigration debate even more into the realm of public discourse. Further evidence, at least in the form of public opinion polls, reinforces the negative effect on the public that illegal immigrants can have. For example, according to one poll, 89% of Americans think illegal immigration into the U.S. is a problem (30% “extremely serious,” 33% “very serious,” and 26% “somewhat serious” (Time Magazine, Jan. 2006)), and a New York Times/CBS poll reports that 82% of those polled believe that not enough is being done along the borders to keep illegal immigrants from crossing into the country. (New York Times/CBS May 2007).

For example, there is a well-developed academic literature on the non-negative economic

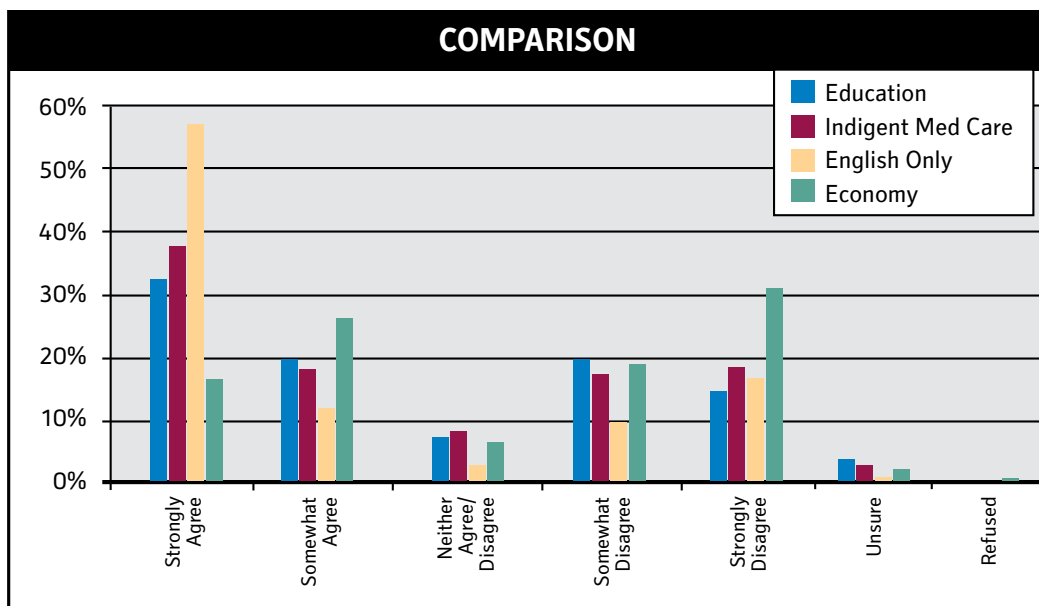
impact of illegal immigrants. Jones (2008, 137) argues that Mexican immigrants perform what he calls the “3-D jobs,” meaning dirty, dangerous, and dead-end, which in turn, marginalizes them from mainstream society even more as the pay and benefits associated with 3-D jobs pushes the workers out of the mainstream economy and out on the fringe, in terms of pay and benefits. Muller (1993) notes that government and business generally favor more liberal immigration policies because of positive economic and societal impacts, while the general population, for fear of change in the cultural identity, are generally less comfortable with immigrants and support stricter immigration laws and policies.

Muller further argues that immigrants play a vital role in the economic growth of America, particularly in the large cities. While he concedes that immigrants absorb jobs from native-born citizens, he also contends that the contribution to the tax base counterbalances those losses. “Immigration remains the most pragmatic way to supplement the American work force in occupations short of dependable help” (306-307).

In the 18th Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey, those surveyed were asked to respond to the statement, “In your opinion, a stricter immigration policy will negatively impact Idaho’s economy.” These are the results of the survey.



- » The plurality of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that stricter immigration policy will negatively affect Idaho’s economy, with 31% of the responses.
- » The next greatest concentration of responses is found in the “somewhat agree” category, with 25% of the respondents indicating thusly to the statement.
- » Those respondents who strongly agreed with the statement make up 16%. The difference in percentage of respondents who strongly agreed and those who strongly disagreed is 15%.



The graph above is an overlay of distributions to the statements: “Undocumented immigrants reduce the overall quality of education for Idaho children,” “Counties should deny indigent medical care to immigrants,” “Idaho should adopt an English only policy for the state,” and “a stricter immigration policy will negatively impact Idaho’s economy.”

- » Overall, distributions of the first three issue statements (education, indigent medical care, and English-only policy adoption) are similar.
- » The statement about stricter policy impacting the economy of the state is negative, meaning that those who agree with the policy disagree with the statement. If this statement had been phrased positively, meaning that those who agree with the policy agree with the statement, then its distribution would have been more consistent with the other responses.
- » All other statements are positive, and the plurality of all other respondents strongly agree with the statements.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To interpret these survey responses and draw analysis from them is to tell a story that is not complete. What we know, it seems, is that there is much that we do not know related to immigration and its effects on policies in Idaho. We have a fairly clear understanding of how Idahoans perceive immigrant influences from these surveys. The question is, to what extent do perceptions adhere to actual implications?

The aforementioned scholars lead to the following conclusions. First, undocumented students have cultural biases against them, either tacit or direct. Often, from a cultural perspective, English is not the primary language spoken in the home or even the community. As the exams are almost exclusively administered in English, we can see the disparate disadvantages. Second, Latino students – and undoubtedly undocumented students – have a higher dropout rate than their Anglo and African-American counterparts (Leal,

Martinez-Ebers and Meier 2004). Clearly, the theoretical assumptions of the struggles Hispanic students would lead us to conclude that overall, their scores on performance indicators will be lower than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

Clearly, the education literature's biggest hurdle to overcome is no different than the general immigration literature's biggest hurdle, namely, trying to gather information on the number of illegal immigrants in any particular state. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that based on its predictions, 8.5 million of the 10.3 million unauthorized migrants are Hispanic (Passel 2005), but does not provide state-level numbers, and again, these are only predictions.

The illegal immigrant population is a notoriously difficult population to study empirically, as they are a population that does not prefer to be found. However, there are potential paths around these barriers. For example, in Idaho, we do not track undocumented students in schools. In fact, *Plyler vs. Doe* (1982) forbids denying public education to undocumented students. The Idaho State Department of Education has no official policy for tracking or recording undocumented students. Were we to have empirical data, we could test, for instance, the actual effect of undocumented students on overall performance. We can look to other states as examples of this. In Texas, if a student wants to register for public education and does not show proof of citizenship (i.e., Social Security Card) the student is then assigned a Personal Identification Number. The district also collects demographic characteristics. Thus, in Texas, researchers are able to triangulate the population of Hispanic students with PINs at the district level, thus providing a rough proxy for undocumented students.

Clearly, there is more to tell in this story. To what extent do perceptions match reality? What other measures are being used to set policy with regards to immigration? Answering these questions will assist in answering the dilemmas that surround the super-charged emotional issues of immigration.

## REFERENCES

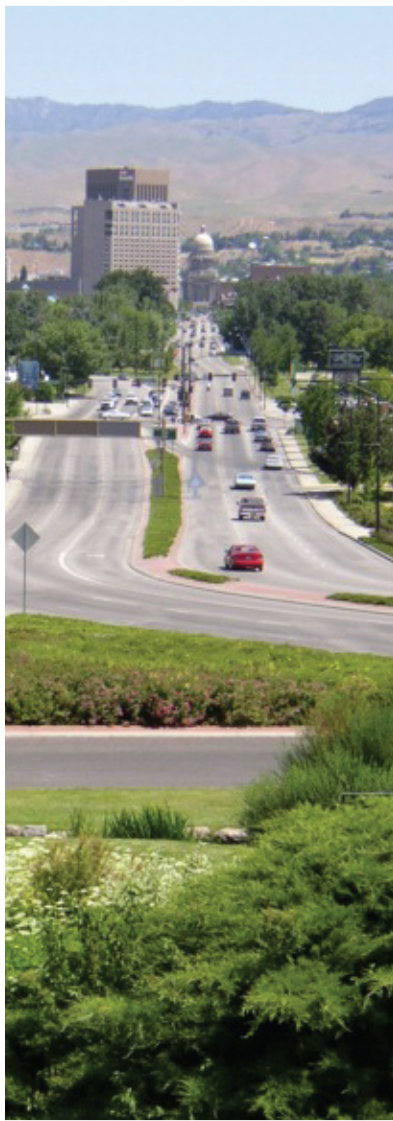
- Arizona Senate Bill 1070. 2010. Accessed May 2010.  
<http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>
- Chomsky, Aviva. 2007. *They Take our Jobs!* Boston: Beacon Press.
- Garcia, Eugene E. 2001. *Hispanic education in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Jones, Richard. 2008. *Immigrants outside megalopolis: Ethnic transformation in the heartland*. Lehman: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Leal, David, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Kenneth J. Meier. 2004. "The Biases of At-Large Elections". *The Journal of politics* 66: 1224-1244.
- Lee, Taeku, S.K. Ramakrishnan, and R. Ramirez. 2006. *Transforming Politics, Transforming America*. Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press.
- Malanga, Steven. 2006. "How unskilled immigrants hurt our economy." *City-Journal*,  
[http://www.city-journal.org/html/16\\_3\\_immigrants\\_economy.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/16_3_immigrants_economy.html)
- Meier, Kenneth J. and Joseph Stewart, Jr. 1991. *The politics of Hispanic education*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Muller, Thomas. 1993. *Immigrants and the American City*. New York: New York University.
- Ochoa, Alberto. 2003. "The struggle of access: The achievement trends of Latino youth in middle and high school." In *Latino students in American schools*, ed. Valentina I. Kloosterman. London: Praeger.
- Passel, Jeffrey S. 2005. "Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population, accessed at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/44.pdf>
- Plyler v. Doe*, 457 US 202 - Supreme Court. 1982.  
[http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0457\\_0202\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0457_0202_ZO.html)
- Wroe, Andrew. 2008. *The Republican Party and Immigration Politics: From Proposition 187 to George W. Bush*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Gregory Hill, Ph.D.** is Assistant Professor of Public Policy & Administration and Director of the Applied Research Program. He completed his Ph.D. at Texas A&M University in 2006. He earned his MPA from Idaho State University. His interests center on public management, administration, and policy theory. He has written articles for *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management* (2005) and the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (2005) and has presented papers at several conferences including the annual meetings of the Southwest Political Science Association (2003) and the Midwest Political Science Association (2004). His research centers on the influence of constituents on governance.







**DR. STEPHANIE WITT, DIRECTOR  
PUBLIC POLICY CENTER  
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

Public Affairs and Art West Building, Rm 128  
Boise State University  
Boise, ID 83725-1935  
208.426.1476  
208.426.4370 fax

<http://ppa.boisestate.edu/centerppa>