



## Rural Poll reflects immigration concerns

*BY NATE JENKINS / The Associated Press*

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A majority of rural Nebraskans don't believe the influx of Latin immigrants has been good for the state, according to poll results released Monday.

They also think undocumented immigrants should be deported, and that communities should not relay important information in Spanish, the poll shows.

"I was a little surprised," by the extent of the anti-immigration sentiment expressed by rural Nebraskans, said Rebecca Vogt, project manager for the Nebraska Rural Poll.

The poll was conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Applied Rural Innovation.

"I live in a rural community," Vogt said, "so I knew there would be some sentiment against, but maybe not to this extent."

Just 14 percent of respondents said Latin American immigration had been good for rural Nebraska, while 56 percent disagreed. Respondents were not asked if they thought Latin immigration was bad for the state, just if it had been good for the state.

Hispanics responded much differently to that and other questions posed in the surveys.

The surveys were mailed in March to 6,200 randomly selected households in rural counties. The same survey was also sent to almost 700 randomly selected rural households with Latino surnames.

The response rate among Hispanics was 22 percent, compared to the 40 percent response rate overall to the survey.

Citing the low response rate among Hispanics, Vogt said people should be cautious about ascribing the views in the results to that population as a whole.

Seventy percent of Hispanic residents believed immigration has been good for communities.

"Most communities have not looked at the question of 'How can we view immigrants as an asset?'" said UNL sociologist Miguel Carranza.

Less than half of all respondents — 38 percent — said immigrants are often discriminated against in rural Nebraska.

That differs sharply from the views of most Hispanics surveyed. Sixty-one percent said they believe Latin American immigrants suffer discrimination.

"It seems that Nebraskans feel they're more welcoming to newcomers than newcomers feel they are welcomed," said Alan Tomkins, director of the University of Nebraska's Public Policy Center.

While the poll results illustrate some discomfort among rural Nebraskans about immigration, a majority said that undocumented workers who have been working and paying taxes for at least five years should be allowed to apply for citizenship.

Hispanics who have lived in the state more than five years tended to have views closer to those of non-Hispanics.

The immigrant and Hispanic population of Nebraska has been rising for years, partially due to the presence

of the meatpacking industry, forcing rural residents to confront changing demographics in their small towns.

The U.S. Census estimated last year that the increase in Nebraska's Hispanic population has accounted for 70 percent of the state's overall growth since 2000, and that the Hispanic population has increased 27 percent since that time.

This was the first year that questions about Latin immigration were included in the rural poll, according to Vogt.

Other findings of the poll:

— 69 percent of respondents disagreed that important information should be relayed in both English and Spanish; 76 percent of Hispanic respondents said both languages should be used.

— 23 percent of respondents disagreed that rural communities do a lot to include immigrants, compared to 46 percent of Hispanics.

— 87 percent of respondents want the government to tighten borders to prevent illegal immigration, compared 45 percent of Hispanics.

— 72 percent of respondents opposed granting in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants under the age of 21 who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years. Fifty-seven percent of Hispanics supported in-state tuition.

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