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Zogby/Inter-American Dialogue Survey: Public Views Clash with U.S. Policy on Cuba, Immigration, and Drugs

Survey finds 60% of likely voters favor revised policies toward Cuba; 76% believe war on drugs is failing

UTICA, New York – The views of likely voters on issues involving other countries in the Western Hemisphere, including the war on drugs, immigration, and relations with Cuba, are often in contrast with current U.S. policies, a new Zogby /Inter-American Dialogue interactive survey shows.

The survey results were released this morning at the Miami Herald's 12th Annual Americas Conference, which is taking place Thursday and Friday in Coral Gables, FL. The Zogby Interactive survey of 4,752 likely voters nationwide was conducted Sept. 23-25, 2008, and carries a margin of error of +/- 1.5 percentage points.

“The poll results indicate that American public opinion is far more open and flexible on issues of importance for US relations with Latin America than current policy would suggest,” noted Peter Hakim, the President of the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington think tank that collaborated with Zogby International on the poll. “It also suggests, however, that public opinion may not be all that relevant in decisions regarding policy issues of greatest concern to Latin America—that these may be largely determined by smaller groups with intense sentiments about the issues,” Hakim added.

Cuba

Now that Fidel Castro is no longer officially in power in Cuba, 60% of likely voters believe the U.S. should revise its policies toward Cuba – even more believe all U.S. citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba (68%) and that U.S. companies should be allowed to trade with Cuba (62%). In a Zogby Interactive survey conducted in July 2007, slightly more than half (56%) of Americans said the U.S. should remove travel restrictions and end the embargo on trade to Cuba.

- More Obama supporters favored revising US policies toward Cuba (84%) than McCain supporters (35%). Forty-seven percent of McCain supporters thought all US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba, and 40% thought US companies should be allowed to trade with Cuba.

The war on drugs

Three in four likely voters (76%) believe the U.S. war on drugs is failing, a sentiment that cuts across the political spectrum – including the vast majority of Democrats (86%), political independents (81%), and most Republicans (61%). There is also a strong belief

that the anti-drug effort is failing among those who intend to vote for Barack Obama (89%) for president, as well as most supporters of John McCain (61%).

When asked what they believe is the single best way to combat international drug trafficking and illicit use, 27% of likely voters said legalizing some drugs would be the best approach -- 34% of Obama supporters and 20% of McCain backers agreed.

- One in four likely voters (25%) believe stopping the drugs at the border is the best tactic to battle drugs -- 39% of McCain supporters, but just 12% of Obama backers agree.
- Overall, 19% of likely voters said reducing demand through treatment and education should be the top focus of the war on drugs.
- 13% believe that the best way to fight the war on drugs is to prevent production of narcotics in the country of origin.

Immigration

Slightly more than half of likely voters (52%) said they oppose a new path to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. who are in the country illegally, while 39% said they favor the development of a path to citizenship. A new path to citizenship is supported by 64% of Democrats, but just 17% of Republicans and 34% of Independents.

When presented with more specific parameters of a path to citizenship, however, there was a marked increase in support. Sixty-seven percent would support a path to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. illegally if they pay taxes, pay a penalty and learn English -- 80% of Democrats, 57% of Republicans and 62% of political independents agree with this new path to citizenship. More than half (54%) said the same for immigrants who were brought to the U.S. by their parents before their 16th birthday. Most (53%) also support expanding temporary worker programs for migrants as a way to fill jobs that are not being taken by American workers.

- 58% of likely voters support strengthening or expanding a fence along the U.S. border with Mexico as the best way to stop illegal immigration -- 86% of McCain supporters support the a border fence while only 28% of Obama supporters said the same.
- Likely voters are divided on this issue of supporting a new path to citizenship for an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. who have no criminal record – 45% would support such a plan while 46% would oppose it. Obama supporters are overwhelmingly in favor of such a plan (69%), compared to just 26% of McCain supporters who said the same.

Other findings from the survey include:

- Nearly half of likely voters (46%) believe the next U.S. president should seek new diplomatic ties with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez -- 10% of respondents want to the U.S. to break relations with Venezuela. A far larger number of Obama

- supporters (78%) favored seeking new diplomatic ties with Venezuela than McCain supporters (15%).
- 42% of likely voters believe that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), passed in 1993 with Canada and Mexico, should be revised, while 21% believe it should be left unchanged – another 17% believe it should be withdrawn.
 - One in four likely voters (27%) believe a proposed Colombia-U.S. trade agreement should be ratified by the U.S. Congress with additional human rights conditions, while 18% said it should be ratified as is, and 15% said it should be defeated. More than a third (36%) of likely voters were unfamiliar with the proposed U.S. - Colombia trade agreement.
 - 48% of likely voters believe that the U.S. should lower its 54-cent-per-gallon tariff of Brazilian ethanol being imported into the U.S. -- 26% believe that the tax should not be lowered and another 26% were not sure.
 - Most likely voters (55%) are opposed to the U.S. forming a North American Union with Canada and Mexico, similar to what has been done in Europe with the European Union. Twenty-three percent said they would support this type of union and 21% were not sure.

“While there are significant differences between Obama and McCain supporters on most issues, the poll suggests that the general public agrees on ethanol tariffs, temporary workers, and the failure of the drug war—these are important issues in hemispheric relations that the next U.S. president will have an opportunity to deal with,” Hakim said.

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Please click on the link below to view the data:

<http://www.zogby.com/news/X-IAD.pdf>

For a detailed methodological statement on this survey, please visit:

<http://www.zogby.com/methodology/readmeth.dbm?ID=1338>

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