



*behavior research center's*

# **Rocky Mountain Poll**

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## PUBLIC OVER-ESTIMATES ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN ARIZONA AND BELIEVES MOST LATINOS CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH

Phoenix, Arizona, September 20, 2005. Public concern about the illegal alien phenomenon in Arizona is driven by many perceived factors including their impact on taxpayer-supported social services, crime rates attributed to illegal immigrants, negative environmental impacts in border desert crossing areas, and perhaps as well, by widespread belief by the public that the illegal alien population in Arizona is far larger than it is. In a survey completed in August, it was found that among the 70 percent willing to venture estimates about even the most general characteristics of the Latino population, most people in the poll seriously under-estimate the proportion of Arizona Latinos who are citizens and simultaneously over-estimate the proportion of Latinos who are illegal aliens.

The estimate made by poll responders of the proportion of Latinos who are U.S. citizens is 47 percent. The 2000 U.S. Census, however, reports that 64 percent of Arizona Latinos are native born and another eight percent are naturalized citizens. This would mean that 72 percent of Latinos in this state are U.S. citizens, or 936,000 of the estimated 1.3 million population in 2000.

At the same time, Arizonans over-estimate the proportion of Latinos who are "illegal immigrants." They put their estimate at 39 percent, yet according to the U.S. Census, only 28 percent of the Latino population here are classified as "non-citizens." Further, since not all non-citizens in the state are "illegal aliens", the illegal immigrant figure may be considerably lower. The "non-citizen" definition used by the Census appears to include people who may be here with legal work papers, are tuition paying students at our various universities, and many who have been granted "permanent resident" status, some of whom may be in the lengthy process of applying for citizenship.

Most Arizonans also misunderstand the language skills of Arizona Latinos, seeing the majority of Latinos here as unable to speak English at all. On the other hand, Behavior Research Center surveys of more than 4,000 Latino heads of household in the state over the past three years reveal that 80 percent speak English. This figure is very close to the Pew Center estimate on language skills of Latinos nationwide. In Arizona, the public mistakenly believes that fewer than half of Latinos can speak English.

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The pronounced tendency of Arizonans to under-estimate the English-language skills of Latinos and the proportion of who are U.S. citizens and who simultaneously over-estimate the proportion who are illegal immigrants undoubtedly reflects the impact of confusing and often intemperate political cross-fire over the issue as well as hyperbolic rhetoric used by some politicians. Just this week, for example, a candidate for State Attorney General commented: “To put it bluntly, the state is under siege... and Arizonans are paying the price for the utter failure of our government to do anything substantial about it [illegal aliens].”

The findings outlined in this report are based on a survey of 600 adults heads of household throughout Maricopa County conducted between August 22 and September 2, 2005, by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona as part of the Center’s independent and non-partisan Rocky Mountain Poll series. The public is welcome to visit [www.brcpolls.com](http://www.brcpolls.com) to read this and other recent polls.

The public’s tendency to believe that most Latinos in the state are non-citizens raises questions as to whether the public can reasonably be expected to fairly assess the “illegal immigrant” issue or ballot items pertaining to it in light of such a fundamental misunderstanding of its dynamics. Their over-estimates may also explain why some politicians have found fertile in which to whip up public demands that “something be done” about the state being “overrun” by illegal aliens.

The risk that Arizona’s law-abiding Latino citizens will be tarred with social, economic and even criminal issues that trace only to illegal immigrants, is very real. Equally real, it appears, is a need for commentators and people in the media or in officialdom to avoid painting all Latinos with the same brush. The simple fact is that the vast majority of Arizona Latinos are English speaking citizens of long standing.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This Rocky Mountain Poll Arizona (2005-III-10) is based on 600 telephone interviews conducted from August 22 through September 2, 2005, with adult heads of household throughout Maricopa County. In a sample of this size, one may say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.8 percent of what they would have been had the entire adult population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

**BELOW:** Statistical data

For this and other polls, see [www.brcpolls.com/results](http://www.brcpolls.com/results)

**STATISTICAL DATA**

Behavior Research Center  
Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona  
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*“From what you read or hear, what percent of the Hispanic population in Arizona are U.S.-born citizens?”*

	<u>Among the 70% Making an Estimate</u>
TOTAL	47%
<u>POLITICAL PARTY</u>	
Republican	50
Democrat	43
Independent	44
Not registered	43
<u>ETHNICITY</u>	
Caucasian	46
Hispanic	51
Other	45
<u>GENDER</u>	
Men	49
Women	45
<u>AGE</u>	
Under 35	51
35 to 54	48
55 +	41

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**STATISTICAL DATA**

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*“From what you read or hear, what percent of the Hispanic population in Arizona are illegal aliens?”*

|                        | <u>Among the 70%<br/>Making an Estimate</u> |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| TOTAL                  | 39%                                         |
| <u>POLITICAL PARTY</u> |                                             |
| Republican             | 33                                          |
| Democrat               | 41                                          |
| Independent            | 38                                          |
| Not registered         | 45                                          |
| <u>ETHNICITY</u>       |                                             |
| Caucasian              | 36                                          |
| Hispanic               | 41                                          |
| Other                  | 43                                          |
| <u>GENDER</u>          |                                             |
| Men                    | 35                                          |
| Women                  | 41                                          |
| <u>AGE</u>             |                                             |
| Under 35               | 41                                          |
| 35 to 54               | 35                                          |
| 55 +                   | 39                                          |

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PERCEIVED LANGUAGE SKILLS OF LATINOS IN ARIZONA

	<u>Estimate by the General Public</u>	<u>Actual Language Skills*</u>
Speak English well	48%	80%
Speak Spanish well	77	58

\* BRC Latino Poll – 2000-2005. 4,000 telephone interviews with adult heads of household identifying themselves as Latino.

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