

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES

**FROM:** THE TARRANCE GROUP  
LAKE SNELL PERRY MERMIN/DECISION RESEARCH

**RE:** DALLAS FOCUS GROUPS

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 21, 2005

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On September 8, 2005, The Tarrance Group conducted two (2) focus groups in Dallas, Texas, on the subject of immigration. The groups were each approximately two (2) hours in length, with the first group consisting of “likely” female voters, while the second group consisted of “likely” male voters. Respondents were screened so that only Republicans or Independents who were ideologically moderate to conservative with neutral to negative views about immigration were recruited to participate.

### General Attitudes About Immigration

Respondents in both groups had, initially, overall negative things to say about immigration. They did, however, point out that immigration has created variety in our culture and an influx of intellectual capital, as is evidenced by the various types of restaurants and the leaders in the medical field. Also, respondents mentioned that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and several participants volunteered that they were second generation Americans.

*Well you've got people from other countries that know other things. They have well Mexican food, for example. You know Texas, great Mexican food. Even if they come from other countries they have a tendency to do what they did in whatever their country was, so you know whether it's food they bring or clothing. (Texas female)*

*I guess all through history different groups, different countries, different nationalities or whatever came in and contributed to a melting pot I guess and that's a good thing. I think that I'm glad that our history has done that. I wonder sometimes about some countries that don't, you know, what is the word, ah come together. (Texas male)*

*I think that the people who come here and most are engineers in the graduate programs all across the country, and are foreign students. They're not U.S. students. (Texas female)*

Conversely, they felt that illegal immigration is doing harm to our nation, especially in terms of violence. In addition, respondents were concerned about the economic strain the illegal immigrants are putting on the United States. Misperceptions continue to exist in terms of the free services that are available to immigrants. Nearly all of the respondents felt that the immigrants receive free health care, free in-state college tuition and other government services without being forced to pay taxes. Respondents also mentioned that the needs of illegal immigrants divert resources away from the needs of legal U.S. residents, such as requiring translators to be present in schools.

*And not paying income tax. (Texas female)*

*If they have children I believe we'll educate their children. (Texas female)*

*I have a friend that is an ER Nurse and an illegal immigrant came in that was pregnant and they had this very expensive test, so she got it for nothing. Yet this other person over here who needed an expensive test her insurance wouldn't cover it so therefore she didn't get the test and that happens all the time she said. (Texas female)*

*Well first of all too much of it puts a strain on the resources. In this area alone the taxpayers are having to support all this extracurricular that's going on in the schools, which shouldn't have to be done first of all. And secondly, if you're going to overburden the system with immigration then the tax laws need to be changed and there needs to be a fair playing field for everyone. I don't think immigration is bad, but the way it's being done right now it is. It's going to break this country. (Texas male)*

*And another thing I find out constantly about people that come into the country there's programs that we don't even know about. They know more about our programs than we know because they're coming through the back door. Like for instance there's people, from what I understand, they come over here and start a business for the first five years and they don't even have to pay any income tax at all. (Texas male)*

It was a general consensus that illegal immigrants had no reason to seek legality, since becoming legal could mean losing free government services while being forced to pay taxes.

*Oh I don't think they, yeah I agree with her, they're not going to do it. (Texas female)*

*I think it's impossible. I don't think you could do it [get them to come forward and register]. (Texas female)*

*What's the incentive for them to comply? Why would they bother? (Texas female)*

### **Illegal Immigration**

When asked why the illegal immigrants come here, the reasons provided were largely economic. They felt that illegals come here for a better life, more opportunity and to escape the poor living standards of their home countries. Several respondents conceded that they, themselves, had hired illegal immigrants in the past for various services. Further, respondents indicated that the illegal immigrants are likely to stay because there is no reason to leave.

*Better life. (Texas female)*

*Better opportunity. (Texas female)*

*Jobs. (Texas female)*

*Because the money is better. (Texas male)*

*And part of it is education. (Texas male)*

*...a new start, better wages, better environment, you know a working environment... (Texas male)*

*Well cleaning my house and mowing my lawn you know. (Texas female)*

*I personally hired day laborers to come do some concrete in my yard. (Texas male)*

When prompted with the fact that 11 million illegal immigrants are currently in the United States, many respondents indicated that it was not feasible to think that we could deport them all, while some felt that it could be done. Many of the women felt that they could not all be deported, and mentioned that illegal immigrants will do jobs that Americans will not do; therefore it would result in an economic loss for Americans. Also, the cost of deportation would be very expensive.

*Not all at one time no. (Texas female)*

*I don't think so. I think we'd spend more money deporting them and for them to just turn around and get back in and come back...(Texas female)*

*I don't see how it could happen. (Texas female)*

*Well first of all you're never going to find all 11 million of them. I mean you'd be lucky to be able to deport a million of them before they'd all just spread underground and be hidden to the point where you'd never find them. That and the fact that there would be people protecting them. There's businesses out there that will protect their workforce to whatever degree. It's just going to happen. (Texas male)*

*I don't think we could. (Texas male)*

However, there was some skepticism about the veracity of how one could calculate that 11 million illegal immigrants are here.

*Well how do they know? (Texas female)*

*I mean if you're illegal how do they count them? (Texas female)*

*How do you know that number too by the way? (Texas male)*

Additionally, both groups felt that, since the borders were not secure, illegal immigrants who are deported will simply return to the United States. Some men were much more optimistic that all 11 million could be deported. They conceded that, although the deportation process might only occur over time and the illegal immigrants certainly could not all be deported at once, it still could be done.

*They'd just come back. (Texas female)*

*I don't think so. I think we'd spend more money deporting them and for them to just turn around and get back in and come back... (Texas female)*

*I think it's possible all at one time. (Texas male)*

*Let's start today and let's get them one at a time and let's close off the borders. (Texas male)*

*Do one at a time. Just do one and keep going. (Texas male)*

## **Transition to Legality**

There was board awareness of President Bush's plan to legalize illegal immigrants, with some respondents saying that, although they support the President, they disagree with his proposal.

*Moderator: So you've heard something of President Bush's or Congressional leader's plan for achieving legal status?*

*Texas female: Yes.*

*Texas female: Yes.*

*And the thing is as much as I like George Bush I disagree with him on this deal. (Texas male)*

Women were more accepting than men of a transition to legality. However, the women indicated that, although the idea "sounds good on paper," it really did not seem likely. However their support was driven by the fact that the illegals are already here and they probably will not be leaving, so we might as well make them legal.

*There's 11 million up here now there needs to be some type of system. (Texas female)*

*Pretty much, you know, strengthen the borders. There's nothing more. We've just got to. I think we've been needing to have some sort of registration. It's better to know who some of them are than not to know who any of them are is my view and especially because of 9/11 and the terrorists. (Texas female)*

*I think the problem with it, in my mind is having seen a whole lot of federal programs and listening to people scream about the stuff in New Orleans, you know, what could we do better? I'd sure like to see the stronger borders first and then let's see what they do with the folks that are already here. You know whether they deport them or whether they make them legal. If you leave the borders open you're just saying come and get it. (Texas female)*

The men were initially very turned off by the proposal. They immediately saw the transition as amnesty, whereby all illegal immigrants are automatically granted United States citizenship.

*I think they need to abide by our laws. (Texas male)*

*The whole world will become a U.S. citizen. (Texas male)*

In addition, some participants wanted requirements like passing physicals and taking civics to be added to any transition to legality. Other suggestions included proposals like retina scans and using DNA samples for tracking.

*...you've got to pass a physical. You can't have any serious illnesses or anything. (Texas male)*

*Have them learn about our culture and stuff I think. (Texas female)*

*One thing I'd like to see is everybody be fingerprinted so when I get reregistered or whatever you match up the prints with the number you've got. (Texas female)*

*Fingerprint, DNA. (Texas male)*

Although there were initial negative reactions to the idea of a transition to legality, both groups eventually came to support it. Nearly all respondents realized that it is unreasonable to expect the United States government to deport all illegal immigrants, and said that they supported some type of legalization plan as long as it is accompanied by stronger borders and stronger enforcement of the law.

### **Requirements for Becoming Legal**

Respondents were quick to mention what requirements they prefer to see the illegal immigrants have before becoming legal. First and foremost, they want them to begin paying taxes, and to be denied government services if they are not paying taxes. This would require at least one member of the household to hold a job, which was something that the respondents supported.

*At least they have to pay taxes. (Texas male)*

*I think it would be good to be able to reward these 11 million if they show that they have been gainfully employed for the last three years or longer hey, you know what I'm saying, in other words with a steady job. (Texas male)*

*If the Federal Government cut off funding to the hospitals they won't be so eager to come over here. (Texas male)*

*Cut the freebies. Cut the welfare. (Texas male)*

*If they're over here they need to pay taxes, whoever it is, like we do. Contribute and pay like everybody else does. (Texas female)*

*Somebody in the household needs to get a job. (Texas female)*

Also, they want the illegal immigrants to be forced to learn English. The immigrants do not necessarily need to be fluent in English, but they should be required to take a minimum number of language classes.

*We've got to have English. (Texas male)*

*I don't think that's too much to ask for the people in our country to be able to speak English rather than to expect, you know, the country, the rest of the country to speak whatever other language it is. (Male)*

*Like maybe they should be required to take some kind of classes or something. (Texas female)*

They did not feel that fining the illegal immigrants who come to register would be a good policy, as it would discourage illegals from entering the legality process. Instead they felt that illegal immigrants should have an incentive for registering, such as being denied health care and other government services. This, they felt, would nearly force the illegals to either come forward and register or leave the country.

*Take their welfare away and make them pay taxes. (Texas male)*

*Well if you don't have the money, you can't pay fines. (Texas male)*

*And I think somebody was talking about no pain, no gain. You know hit them in the back pocket, you know, make them pay taxes, take the welfare, take the money from the hospitals so that there's no freebies. (Texas male)*

*They have to pay taxes. They don't get a free trip to the ER and get it paid for scott free. (Texas female)*

Additionally, many respondents wanted a formal process of documenting the illegal immigrants, such as fingerprinting them all so that each one would be "in the system."

*They've got to be tracked in the system, registered, somehow being that fingerprinting or however you want to keep track of them. (Texas male)*

*We need to fingerprint them. We need to know exactly who these people are. (Texas female)*

*Again, I think they ought to match them up with some type of system, whatever, you know, fingerprints where we could find out who they are, who they belong to. (Texas female)*

## Amnesty

When asked about the word amnesty, both women and men said that it meant being forgiven for something in the past. Respondents felt that it meant that someone would not be penalized for wrongs in the past, and were “home free.” The term did not generate a great deal of discussion or animosity toward a transition to legality. Some respondents felt that any sort of legalization plan is amnesty, while others felt that only when something is free is it amnesty.

*They're not penalizing them if they're illegal by deporting them. That's what I would think. You're giving them a grace period to become legal. (Texas female)*

*They're home free. They get to stay here. (Texas female)*

*When I hear amnesty you know that is illegal acts are forgiven basically so that folks that are here illegally, we'll just say oh never mind and then let them qualify for whatever job there. (Texas female)*

*I think it still could be amnesty. They're not getting deported. (Texas female)*

*I think if you're going to give anybody legal status that has been here illegally you are giving them amnesty. (Texas male)*

*With some requirements, it's not amnesty. (Texas female)*

However, there were negative sentiments that some previous transition to legality programs had involved nothing more than entering a stadium and pledged fidelity to the United States.

*Because we've had Clinton and some more that sent the wrong message by getting stadiums filled up and standing up and holding up their right hand and taking an oath in masses. That was the wrong message. (Texas male)*

## **Two-Step Program vs. Three-Step Program**

A portion of both groups was devoted to discussing the merits of a two step transition to legality program similar to the proposal in the McCain-Kennedy bill versus a three step transition to legality program with the notable additional step being a requirement to return home for a short time for processing. One key goal of the research was to determine if this returning “home” requirement would have a positive impact on the views of respondents about a transition to legality program.

Respondents in both groups had a difficult time understanding the differences between the two programs and it was clear that the return “home” element did not have a major impact on views about a transition to legality. However, it was clear that the preferred program was the two-step. Respondents simply did not believe that the three-step plan would work, as it would be too much trouble making sure the immigrants went back home.

*I just think it's too complicated. You're going to confuse people. I mean they're in a new country, learn a new language, and then you're saying you have all these steps to do. I just think that way, you know, if you register. They get fingerprinted or what have you, you know, they do know the rules and there is a probationary period of six-year path to permanent status. (Texas female)*

*This doesn't make sense, why go here and then go and get your visa there. (Texas female)*

*You go home and get a work visa. What's the method of madness behind that? (Texas female)*

*To the extent that the program that we have today doesn't work, these extra steps are not going to help at all. (Texas female)*

*I think the three-step one is going to be too hard to administer. Too hard to check on. Too hard for the police to figure out who's not doing it right and who is doing it right. (Texas male)*

*I think go with the two-step one but not just anybody in the 11 million can register. It's got to be people that we know something about, that's got some kind of background check that's done. (Texas male)*

*They won't ever go back home though they'll be back in the situation we started with if we go with the three step. They'll be legal for five years and then woop, the five years is up and now we're illegal again. They ain't going nowhere. (Texas male)*

In sum, respondents liked the simpler plan; however they were not positive that the person should be able to travel internationally. They would prefer that the immigrant not have the opportunity to return home as they please.

*I think international travel ought to be limited. (Texas male)*

*Now if they're here to work they're going to be here. They don't have the need to go back and forth. (Texas male)*

*You're telling them they can't have international travel, but they've got to go home and get a work visa, but how do they do that? (Texas female)*

### **Messaging**

Message testing was only conducted with the women, as the men were less responsive to the idea of a transition to legality altogether. The women were told that any major immigration plan will require the support of the American people, and they were asked which messages would best convince Americans that a transition to legality plan would be best to solve the country's immigration problems.

The top message was that the plan would be accompanied by stricter and harsher enforcement than what is currently imposed. This theme was heard throughout both groups, and is crucial to selling a legality plan. Second, a message which points out that the road to becoming legal will be tough and not simply amnesty worked well among the women. Respondents did not like a message theme of "this is the only way to deal with 11 million illegal immigrants," and should be avoided.

### **Conclusion**

These two focus groups were conducted in an area of the country that is strongly affected by illegal immigration, and consisted of respondents who volunteered to us that they were not strong proponents of immigration. However, by the end of the two discussions, respondents began to realize that the only reasonable way to deal with 11 million illegal immigrants was some sort of transition to legality plan. By simply presenting the facts to respondents on the actual number of illegal immigrants in the United States, they understood that it was not feasible to have a plan whereby they could or would all be deported.

Throughout the entire discussion of a transition to legality, the overarching point that consistently needed emphasizing was that any plan would need to be accompanied with a much stronger border and stronger enforcement of the law. This point had to be constantly repeated when discussing the transition to legality. Respondents would not accept any legality plan that did not include a stronger border and stronger law enforcement than we see now, and these two things must be assured when proposing to legalize anyone.

In addition, it should be noted that each group had an articulate and forceful anti-immigration advocate who held steadfast to their views throughout the group. However, these individuals were not able to alter the views of other participants.