

## **Immigration Debate Still Simmers Beneath the Surface**

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*One of the great hidden issues of this presidential campaign season has been immigration. So dominant an issue in 2006 and 2007, immigration reform - for all the heat it used to generate - has now dropped way down the agenda of national politics. But not for long: early in 2009, immigration reform will be center-stage again. The competing armies have not gone away. They are simply on hold. When they come back we will face the same ten choices as before. So do we favor....*

- 1. Forced repatriation of all undocumented workers*
- 2. Increased raids by ICE inspectors, to trigger voluntary repatriation*
- 3. A steady erosion of welfare rights for undocumented workers and their children*
- 4. The building of longer and longer fences along the southern border*
- 5. New documents for workers, and fines for employers who fail to police them*
- 6. Expanded guest worker programs and more temporary work visas*
- 7. Various routes to legal status for existing undocumented workers*
- 8. A general amnesty for undocumented workers here for a specified period*
- 9. The expansion of national quotas for legal immigrants*
- 10. Reform and speeding up of legal routes for entry to the United States?*

*To a significant degree, Republicans and Democrats split in the middle of that list. The Republican Right is stridently demanding that any post-election "immigration reform" must prioritize items 1-5. It must force undocumented workers to go home. It must erode their rights while here and by build stronger walls to block their return. Progressive voices - more often found in Democratic ranks than in Republican ones - argue the contrary. They want better guest-worker programs and routes to legality for undocumented workers now here, before the building of some stronger border control to prevent a new wave of undocumented entrants.*

*But the fit between program and party is not perfect on immigration. There are plenty of Democratic Congressmen out there wanting the border closed effectively before all else; and labor unions opposed to expanded guest worker programs. There are also Republican-leaning businessmen and politicians wanting routes to legality for the workers they currently employ, and an increase in temporary work visas for those they will employ in the future. And there are Republican politicians flip-flopping up and down this list: caught between a Republican base keen to close the border and a business community keen to keep it open. John McCain is the major case in point. When Conservatives and Progressives clashed on this in 2007, McCain was in favor of comprehensive immigration reform: but not any more. Now he's a wall builder and a forced repatriation candidate, pandering to the Republican base.*

*The moral of this tale for those of us horrified by ICE raids? Call out John McCain on this. Get him to explain why what worked for him in 2007 apparently doesn't now. Check each politician in turn, and let them know that this is still a top priority for progressive voters. Let them know too that, on this as on much else, high numbers are good: not 1-5 but 6-10!*

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<sup>1</sup> an earlier version – **Playing Immigration Reform by the Numbers** – was published in translation as ¿**Qué número apoya?** in *Que Pasa*, May 14-20, 2008)