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Though criticized nationally, Abbott's border policies supported by Texans, poll shows

But results from DMN/UT-Tyler survey also show that while state's residents want a border wall, many back a solution for Dreamers.






A group of mostly Cuban migrants are handed bags for their belongings by Border Patrol agents after crossing the Rio Grande River from Mexico into the U.S. in May along the border wall in Eagle Pass. A new Dallas Morning News/UT-Tyler poll shows support for Gov. Greg Abbott's policies at the border. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

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By [Dianne Solis](#)
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In This Story



[Greg Abbott](#)

Gov. Greg Abbott continues to win majority approval, 51%, for his handling of immigration at the Texas-Mexico border, [according to a new Dallas Morning News/University of Texas at Tyler poll](#).

The August poll of registered voters comes as Abbott, a Republican, campaigns for November reelection and hammers constantly on his expanding border initiative known as Operation Lone Star. The mission has cost taxpayers at least \$4 billion.

[Operation Lone Star](#) rolled out in March 2021 amid border immigration rising to levels not seen in about [two decades](#). Abbott has bused more than 7,000 migrants from Del Rio and [Eagle Pass](#) to Washington, D.C., and [New York City](#), an effort that is ongoing. In April, Abbott had many commercial trucks inspected at the border, tying up traffic on international bridges and costing businesses more than [\\$4.2 billion](#), according to one economist. A state measure to detain immigrants at the border has inspired an [ACLU complaint](#) for an investigation into the possible overstepping of federal authority.

Despite the controversy and chaos, many of Abbott's measures carry support. A clear exception to Abbott's stances is rising public support to grant legal status to immigrants who came to the U.S. as children with a parent or guardian. Support for the group known as Dreamers reached 61%, reflecting jumps among Republican registered voters from May.

National polls have shown even higher support — [about 75%](#) — than that in the red state of Texas.

Partisan split

In general, though, the DMN/UT-Tyler poll spotlights the Texas gulf between Republicans and Democrats, and, to a lesser degree, Latino and non-Hispanic

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white voters.

How big a gulf?

Among voters polled, 84% of Republicans support Abbott's handling of border immigration, but only 24% of Democrats do. Abbott's approval rating on immigration fell to 42% among Latino voters and even farther among Black voters to 31%.

In November, Abbott had a slightly larger approval rating of 52% for his policies at the border. Among Latino voters, that approval weakened to 45% and, for Black voters, to 28%. But 61% of non-Hispanic white voters supported Abbott's handling of immigration at the border.



Trucks wait to be inspected by Texas State troopers at an inspection site close to the recently reopened Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, following the end of a blockade by drivers in Mexico in April to protest of the border inspection policy imposed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

By comparison, in the latest poll, President Joe Biden got 34% approval for "handling immigration at the U.S. Mexico border."

Mark Owens, the UT-Tyler pollster, saw nuance in the numbers.

"It's back up to 34%," Owens said. "This is the highest that we had during the time of his presidency and asking the question." Moreover, disapproval of Biden dropped by about 5 percentage points, Owens noted.

Abbott pitches his initiatives to his core constituency within the Republican party, and to a national audience for a much-rumored run at the White House in two years, said Jeronimo Cortina, a political scientist at the University of Houston. "Gov. Abbott is preaching to a very particular side of the choir ... his core constituency within the Republican Party," Cortina said.

"And obviously to have a more significant national presence toward a potential 2024 run."

Issues like the wall are "highly polarized in terms of right and left," Cortina said, and striking partisan answers can be seen in the poll.

In June, immigration apprehensions along the entire length of the southwest border fell nearly 14% from May. But fiscal year 2022, which began in October,

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is on pace to be a record year in Border Patrol apprehensions and could hit 2 million. About a quarter of those caught by the Border Patrol are migrants who have attempted to cross before. That reflects the fact that a pandemic-related measure carries no legal consequences for repeat tries.

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That pandemic-related measure, known as Title 42, hasn't been lifted because Texas, along with other states run by conservatives, challenged the move by the Biden administration.

Other issues

On another key issue: 50% of voters polled agreed that a wall along the Texas-Mexico border is "necessary for a safe border." Fewer Latino and Black voters, however, agreed that a wall was needed for a "safe border" with 40% of Latinos agreeing and 27% of Black voters.

In November, 44% agreed that a wall along the Texas-Mexico border was "necessary for a safe border."

Sharp partisanship marked results to the "safe border" question, too. Among the polled, 77% of Republicans agreed the wall was needed, while only 21% of Democrats agreed.

Overall, Mark P. Jones, a political scientist at Rice University, said immigration and border security are some of the few winning issues for the governor among Republicans "by a landslide," and among the electorate at large.

"That's one of the reasons why we're going to see Abbott spend quite a bit of time between now and Nov. 8 highlighting his position on immigration and contrasting that with the Biden administration," Jones said.

That's also part of the offensive against Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke, through "guilt by association," Jones said.

Support for Dreamers is a separate issue for a sympathetic class, and the public wants a solution in favor of the immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, Jones said.

Among other poll findings:

- 47% approved of the use of state funds to extend the border wall, while 42% opposed and 11% didn't know. That compared to 45% in approval, 47% in opposition and 8% unsure in November polling.
- 51% approved of bus travel to Washington, D.C., for those migrants who

had been processed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. That matched November. On Aug. 5, [Abbott said](#) buses arrived from the Texas border in New York City.

- 57% supported the use of state funds to deploy the National Guard and DPS officers to patrol the border, compared to 55% in November.
- 78% supported inspecting all commercial vehicles at the border, compared to 70% in November.

Methodology

The Dallas Morning News/UT-Tyler Poll is a statewide random sample of 1,384 registered voters conducted August 1 and 7. The mixed-mode sample includes 412 registered voters surveyed over the phone by the University of Texas at Tyler with support from ReconMR and 400 registered voters randomly selected from Dynata's panel of online respondents. The margin of error for a sample of 972 registered voters in Texas is +/- 2.6 percentage points, and the more conservative margin of sampling error that includes design effects from this poll is +/- 2.8 percentage points for a 95% confidence interval.

The online and phone surveys were conducted in English and Spanish. Using information from the 2020 Current Population Survey and Office of the Texas Secretary of State. The sample's gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, metropolitan density and vote choice were matched to the population of registered voters in Texas.

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[Dianne Solis](#). Dianne covers immigration and social justice issues. The award-winning writer is a Wall Street Journal alum and a former foreign correspondent who was based in Mexico. She was a Nieman fellow at Harvard and holds journalism degrees from Northwestern University and California State University.

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