

# Ahead of the Curve

---

## *Updates on Arizonans' Vision of the U.S.-Mexico Border*

*By Victor Remigio Martínez Cantú and Erik Lee  
December 2017*



## Overview

---

As a southwestern state with a long and complex history of crossborder ties with Mexico, Arizona's view of the U.S.-Mexico border tends to weigh heavily in the national conversation over how the southern border is managed. What is interesting is that Arizona's view seems to be shifting *away from* the national conversation, even since the momentous 2016 presidential campaign. According to a recent survey developed by Mexico's Food and Development Research Center (Centro de Investigación en Alimentación y Desarrollo, CIAD) and the North American Research Partnership (NARP), Arizona currently has a much different attitude with respect to the U.S.-Mexico border and related subjects.

NARP and CIAD recently interviewed 600 residents of the state of Arizona to gauge their attitudes and opinions towards the U.S.-Mexico border and other key topics regarding the US-Mexico relationship. The results of the survey (conducted with a sample size of 600 Arizona residents from November 6-14) might be surprising to those who remember the SB 1070 discussions of 2010-2011.

The opportunities and challenges of the region clearly emerge in the survey responses. Security, illegal immigration, and drug trafficking all (predictably) emerge as important concerns that Arizonans have towards the state's southern neighbor. At the same time, however, its citizens prize policies that facilitate trade, crossborder shoppers and legal workers into the state. Most notably for the national conversation, at least for the moment, a majority of Arizonans do not support proposals such as an expanded border wall or hardline immigration policies.

## The Strengths of De-bordering and Re-bordering<sup>1</sup>

---

As seen in Figure 1 below, a strong majority of the Arizonans surveyed rejected an expanded border wall with Mexico, with 68% of respondents against the proposal and 32% in support. This is significant because the border wall proposal, one of the signature policies of President Donald Trump, was first proposed during the 2016 campaign and continues to be emphasized in the President's speeches and news briefings. The policy seeks to not only to combat illegal immigration, but also to combat national security threats, illicit drugs and Central American gangs such as MS-13 (*Mara Salvatrucha*). The Department of Homeland Security has even constructed prototype displays of potential border wall designs in San Diego, California.

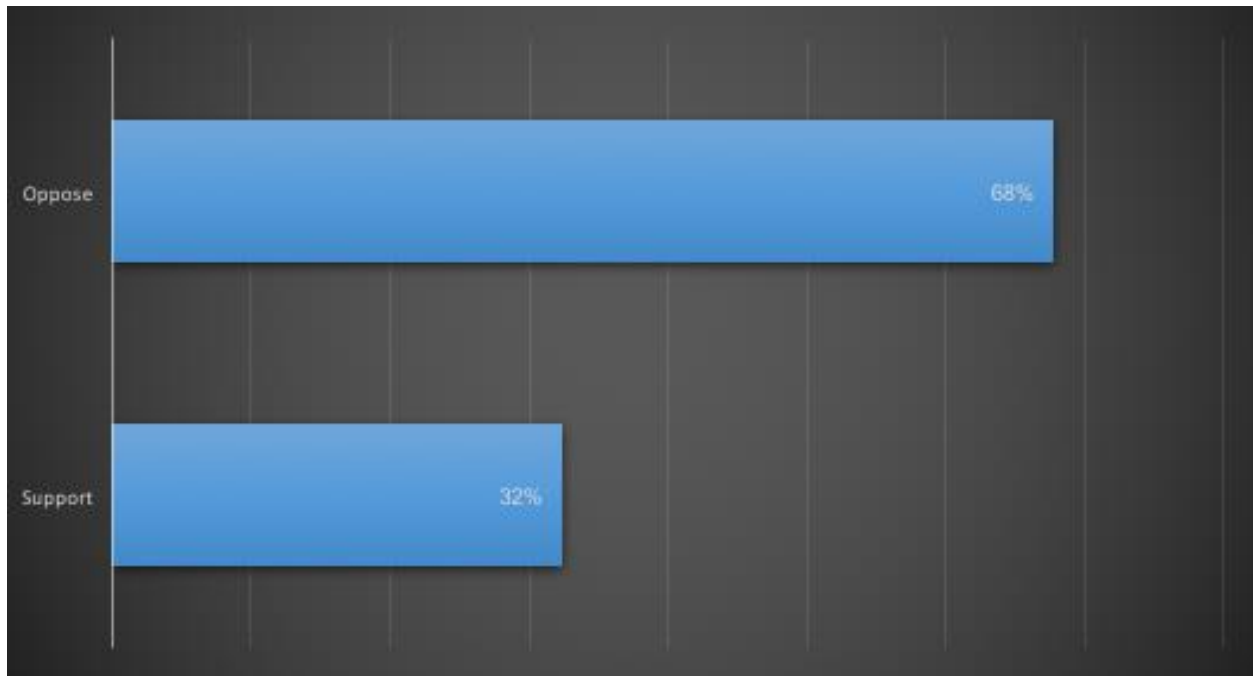
The responses of Arizonans on the issue of the expanded border wall seem to be in sync with recent surveys ([Gallup, March 2017](#)) on national opinions regarding the border wall, which showed 56% of Americans rejecting the wall and 36% in favor. The result in

---

<sup>1</sup> "Rebordering refers to reinforcing the divisions between countries or regions. The term "debordering" refers to facilitating the crossing of a border.

Arizona was also found to be in sync with recent results that showed evidence that states closer to the border have less support for this measure ([Pew Research, October 25<sup>th</sup>](#)).

**Figure 1: Do you support or oppose the construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico?**

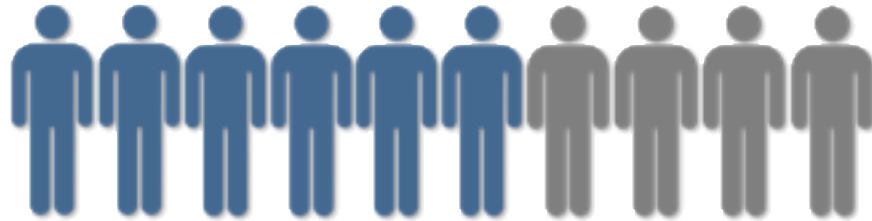


Support for additional legal measures against migrants was also opposed by a majority of respondents, with 61% of respondents against the measures versus 39% in favor of them (see Figure 2 below). These numbers are particularly relevant as it is now seven years since former Governor Jan Brewer signed Arizona Senate Bill 1070 into law, the objective of which was to counter illegal immigration in Arizona. As recently as 2015, opinion surveys ([Morrison Institute, March 2015](#)) found that around 50% of respondents in Arizona supported “aggressive [measures] for the deportation of immigrants.”

Public opinion appears to be in line with shifting political realities in the state, including the state legislature, where since March 2016 have been no signed bills that are considered anti-immigrant. Donald Trump won Arizona in 2016 with 48.1% to Hillary Clinton’s 44.6%, a historically narrow victory of 3.5 points in what is what is generally considered a safe Republican state. In addition, Paul Penzone defeated incumbent Joe Arpaio for Maricopa County Sherriff 53.4% to 44.4%. This all stands in contrast to the

2014 gubernatorial election in which Republican Doug Ducey defeated Democrat Fred Duval 53.4% to 41.5%, an 11.9% difference.

**Figure 2: Do you support or oppose more laws to deport immigrants without lawful status?**



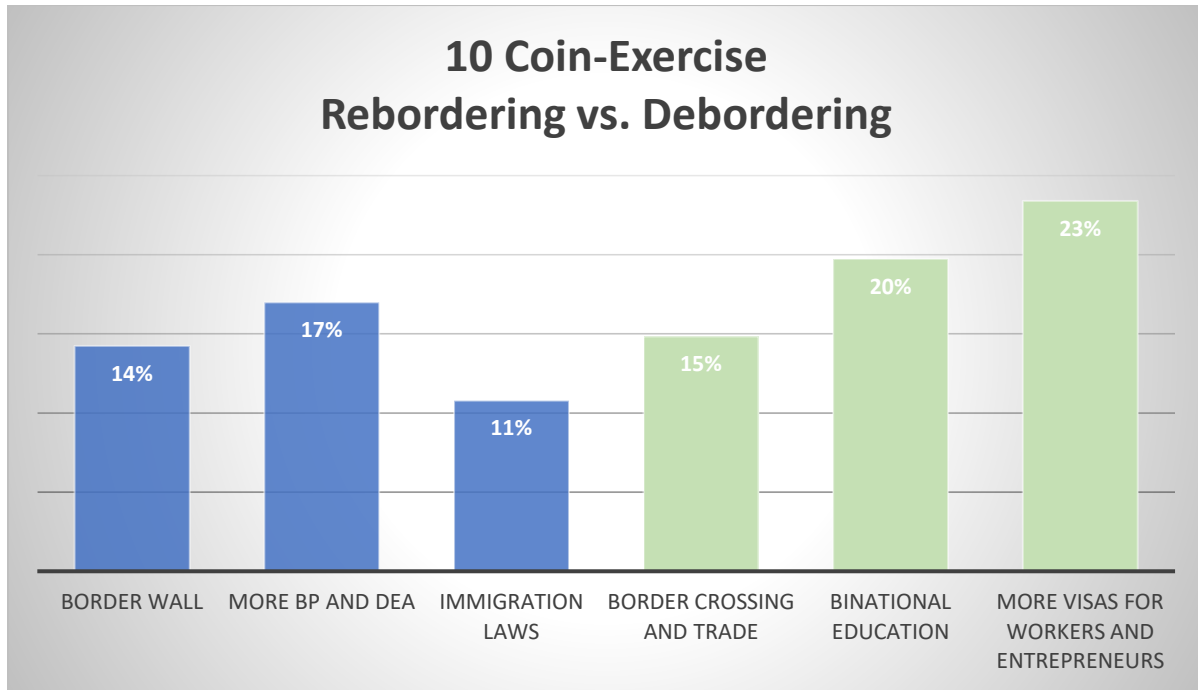
***6 out of 10 respondents oppose more laws to deport immigrants without lawful status.***

***4 out of 10 respondents support more laws to deport immigrants without lawful status.***

To gain additional insights into the importance of certain policies, survey respondents were asked to distribute 10 coins towards 6 policy objectives in order to weigh policy objectives by importance. *Rebordering* measures included a border wall, more Border Patrol and DEA agents on the border and stricter immigration laws. In contrast, the following *debordering* policies were offered: opening additional border crossings to facilitate commerce and transit of people, binational educational agreements with Mexico, and more temporary visas for workers and entrepreneurs.

In the aggregate, 58% of the coins were put towards *debordering* policies and 42% towards *rebordering*, with an increase in temporary visas and more border agents the most popular policies in each of the opposing general policies (see Figure 3 below).

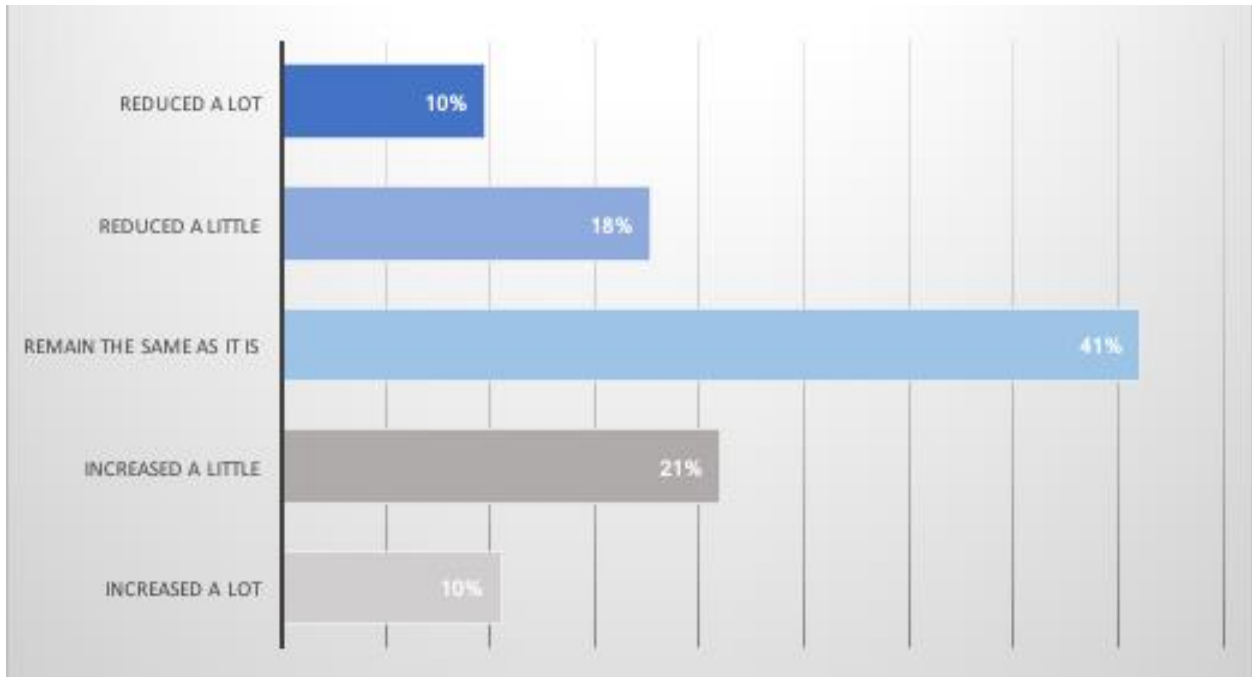
**Figure 3: Which specific border policies do you support?**



Interviewees were also given the opportunity to express their opinions answering open-ended questions on issues regarding the U.S.-Mexico border. A significant majority of the issues brought up centered on illegal immigration, drug trafficking, as well as issues related to trade.

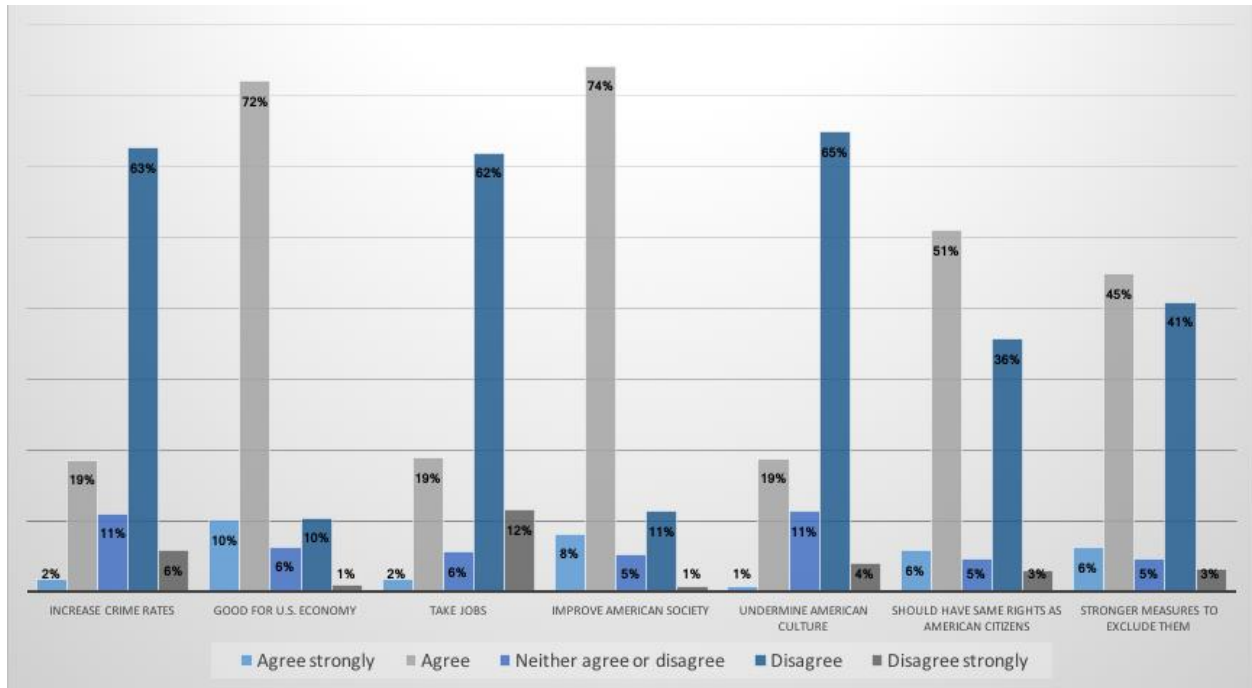
Immigration continues to be a top-level public policy concern, but opinion on this topic has shifted somewhat. The results of the survey showed that a majority of respondents did not consider immigrants to be the primary cause of insecurity or a threat to employment. As seen in Figure 4 below, 41% of respondents stated that the level of immigration should be kept at the current level, while 31% believed the level should be increased and 28% wanted immigration levels to be decreased.

**Figure 4: How much immigration should the United States have?**



The majority of Arizonans surveyed did not believe that immigrants increased crime (69%) or took jobs from Americans (74%). They also consider that immigrants are good for the economy (82%) and improve American society (82%). However, 57% think they shouldn't have the same rights than Americans and 51% think there should be stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants (see Figure 5 below). Note that these particular questions replicate standard questions utilized in surveys around the world by the [International Social Survey Programme](#).

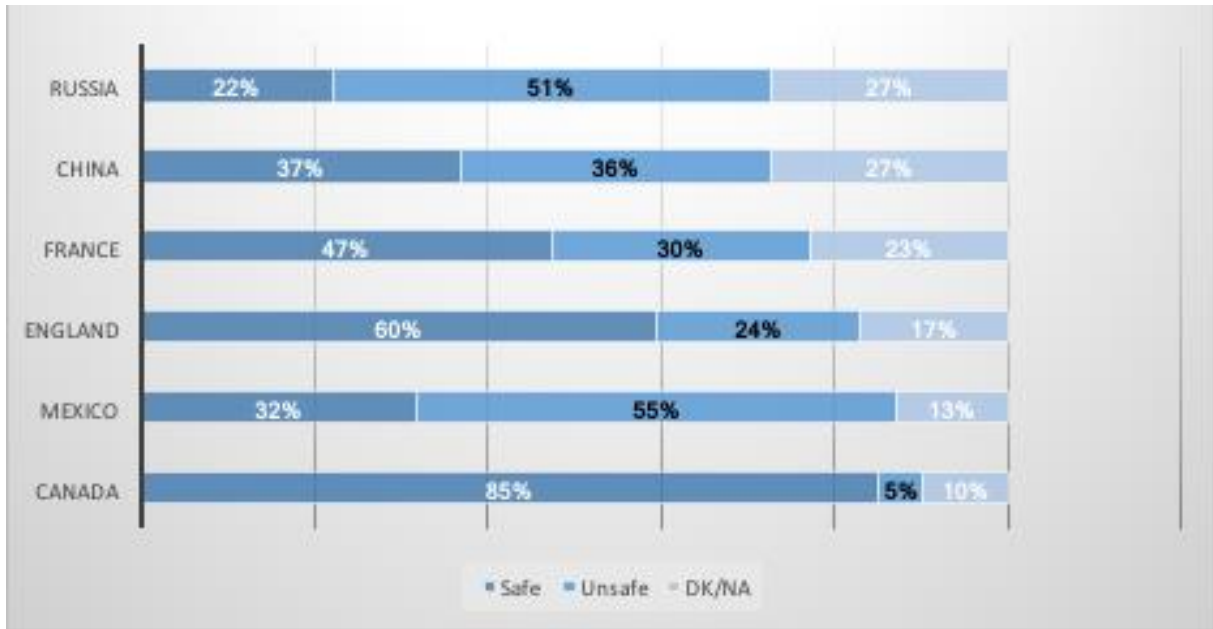
**Figure 5: Questions regarding immigrants and their impact on the United States.**



**Mexico: Not Safe, but Not a Threat to the U.S.**

Ongoing rule of law challenges in Mexico continue to be reflected in news media reports and public opinion regarding the U.S.’ southern neighbor. When respondents were asked to compare their perceptions of security in six countries, Mexico obtained the highest level of unfavorable opinions; 55% of survey respondents considered Mexico to be unsafe (although 32% considered the country to be safe). See Figure 6 below.

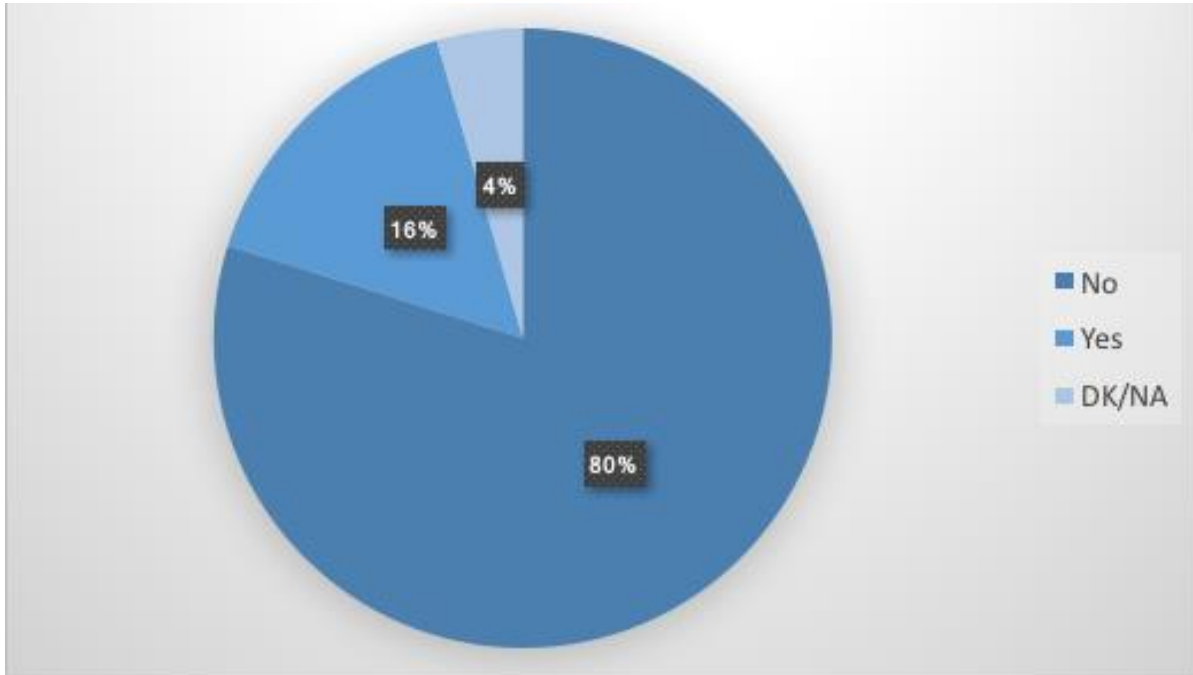
**Figure 6: How safe or unsafe do you think the following countries are?**



However, while those surveyed consider Mexico to be unsafe, the majority of interviewees (80%) did not consider Mexico to be a threat to the United States (see Figure 7 below). These responses are significant in light of recent debates over the concept of “spillover violence” from Mexico to the United States.



**Figure 7: Do you think Mexico represents a threat to the United States?**

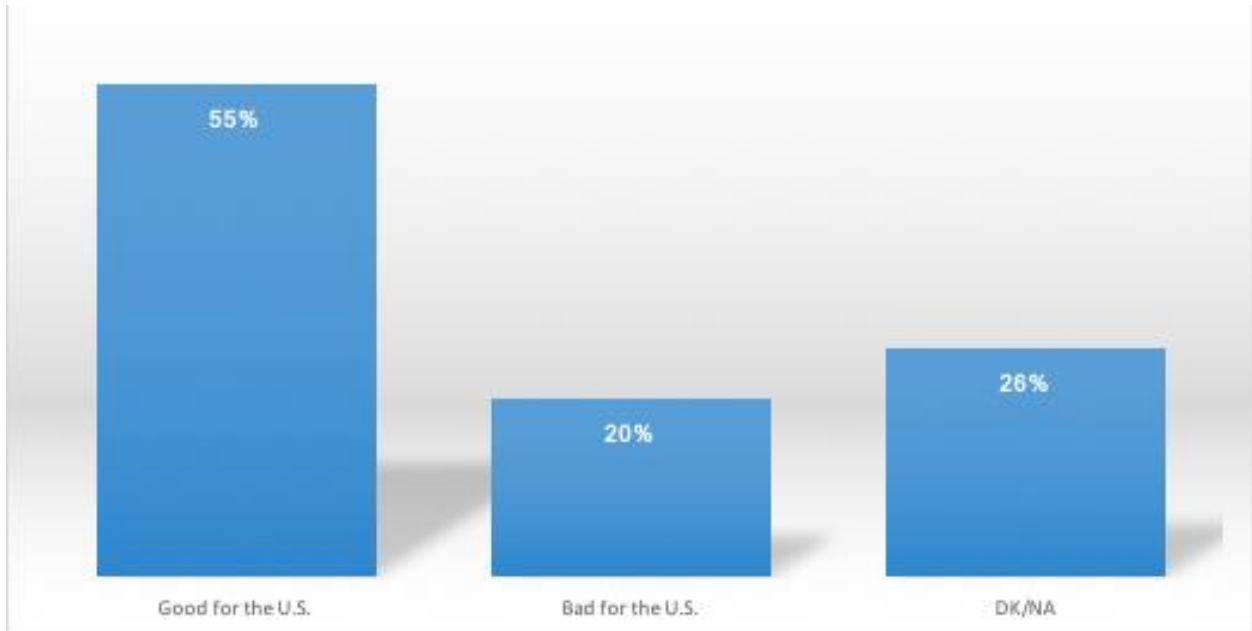


### **Arizonans Believe in Free Trade**

---

Many considered the 2016 election to be a referendum on free trade; as a border state, Arizona has an enormous trading relationship with Mexico—its largest trading partner—and much at stake in this policy area. A [recent report](#) from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce argued that Arizona is one of the states that would lose the most in terms of employment and business profits if the U.S. backs out of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The report argued that close to 236,000 workers are at risk and that Arizona firms' profits from free trade with Mexico are in the range of \$10 billion; 47% of Arizona exports go to Canada or Mexico. It appears that Arizonans appear to be taking this data into account in their assessment of free trade, as 58% consider free trade as something good for the United States and 55% support NAFTA as something positive for the country (see Figure 8 below).

**Figure 8: Overall, do you think NAFTA has been good or bad for the U.S.?**

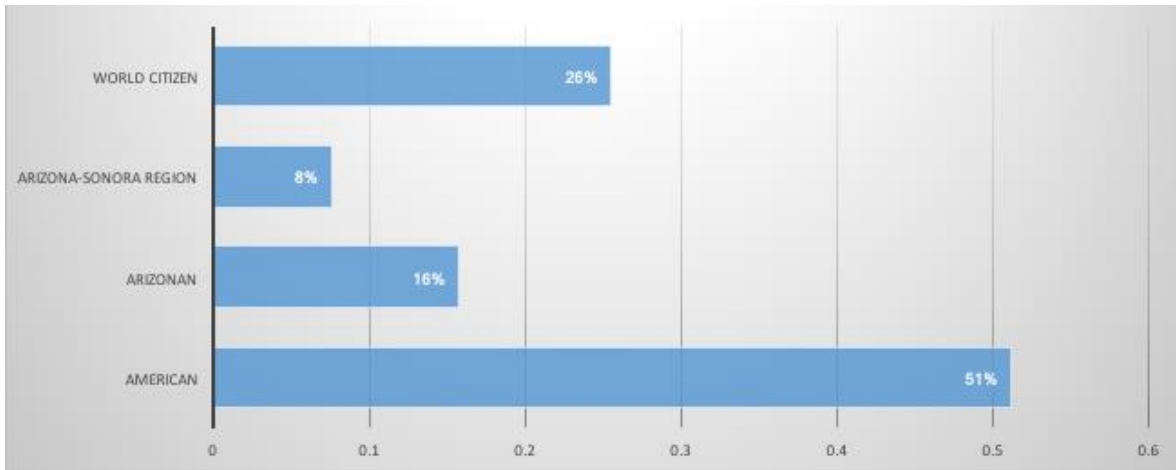


### **Arizona, Identity and Region**

---

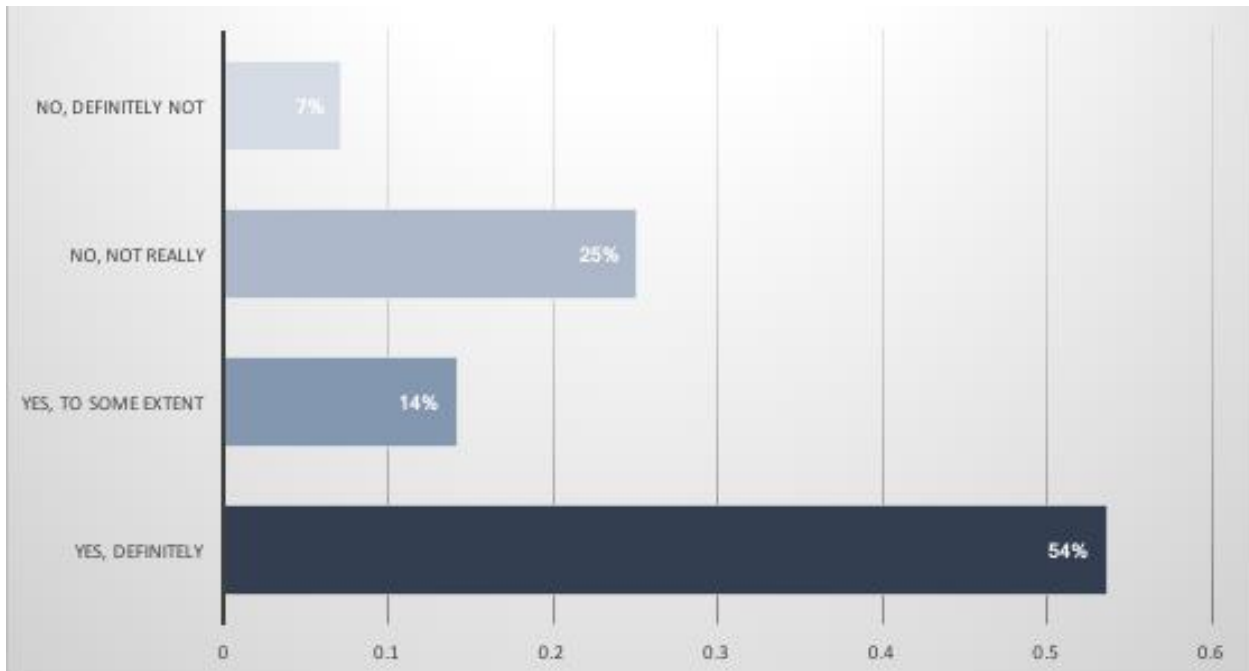
One of the important aspects of the survey were questions relating to survey respondents' sense of identity. The large majority of the interviewees, when given a single option, demonstrated a greater sense of identity with the United States; 45% identified as Americans and 22% as Americans and Arizonans. To test this concept again, the 10 coin exercise was utilized in order to analyze social identification. The results were consistent with the previous question, with 51% identifying as Americans. However, given the option of adding other identities, 26% also considered themselves as Citizens of the World and 24% identified with Arizona or Arizona-Sonora (see Figure 9 below).

**Figure 9: Thinking about your identity or think of yourself, if you had 10 coins, how many would you give to the following options?**



When offered the option, 54% of Arizonans are open to the idea of a shared region with the neighboring state of Sonora (see Figure 10 below).

**Figure 10: Do you or don't you feel part of the Arizona–Sonora Region?**

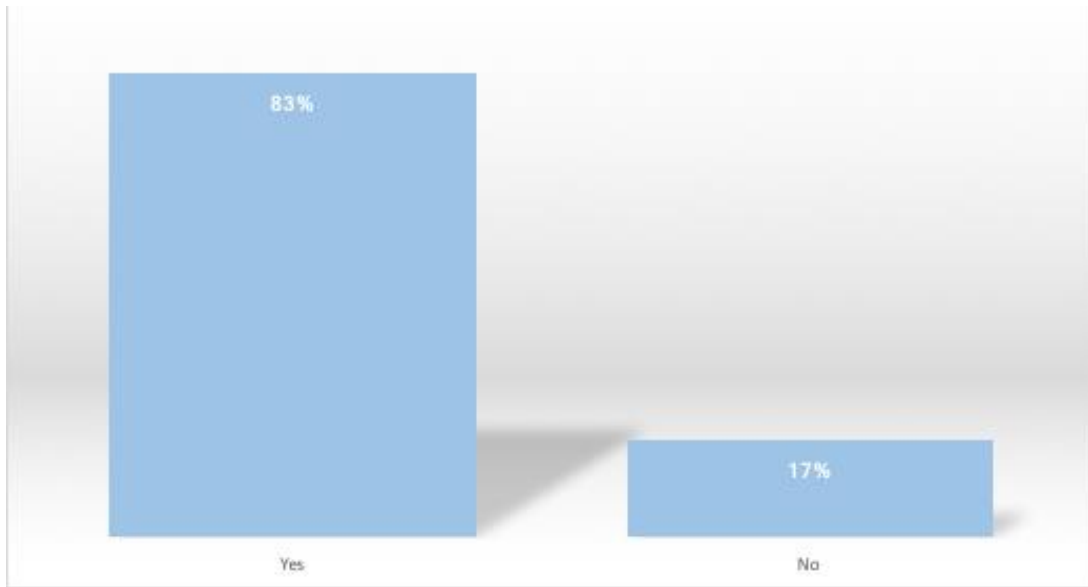


## Arizona's Familiarity with Mexico

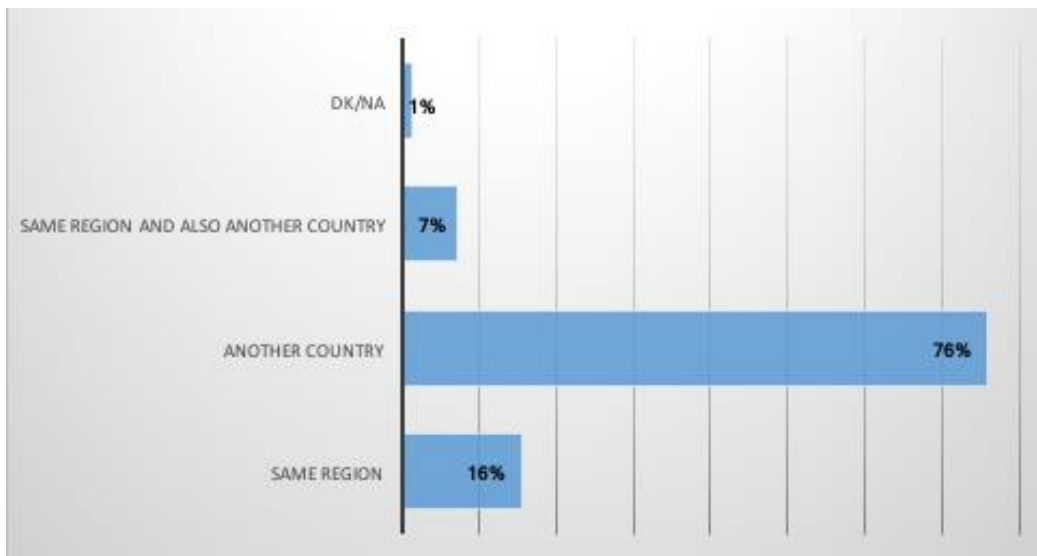
---

Another variable the study analyzed was if Arizonans had visited Mexico at any time in their life and if they had familial or other non-work related ties to individuals in Mexico. Eighty-three percent responded that they had visited Mexico at some point (see Figure 11 below). Of those that answered in the affirmative, 23% considered the visit to Mexico as a visit to the same region in which they live (see Figure 12).

**Figure 11: Have you visited Mexico?**

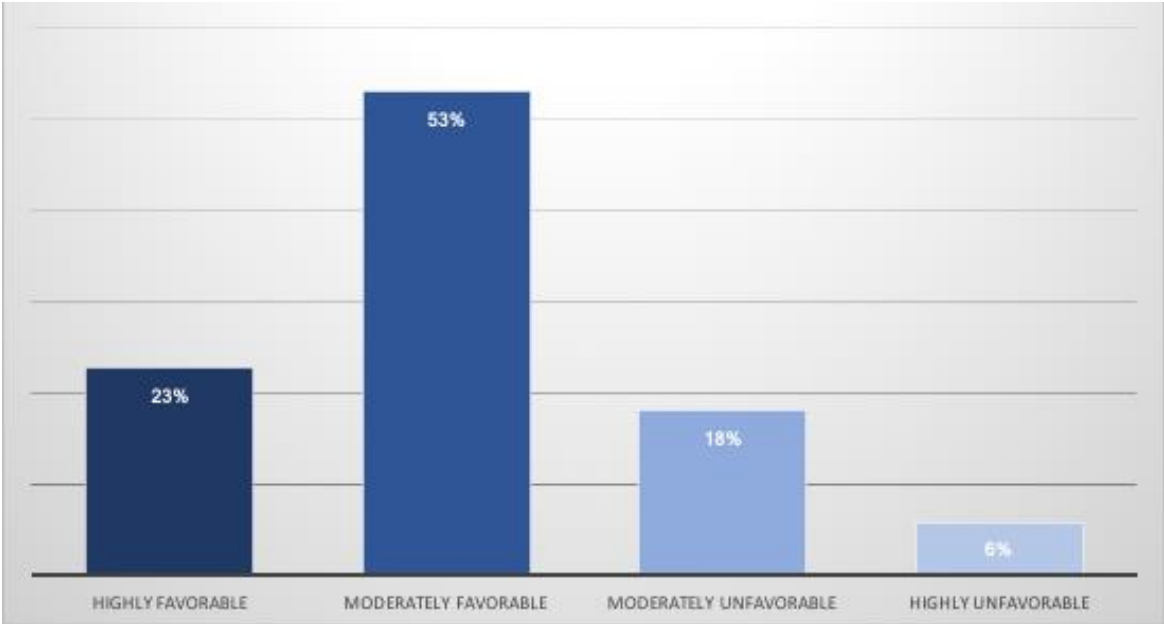


**Figure 9: When you visit Mexico, do you feel you are in another country or in the same region that you live in?**

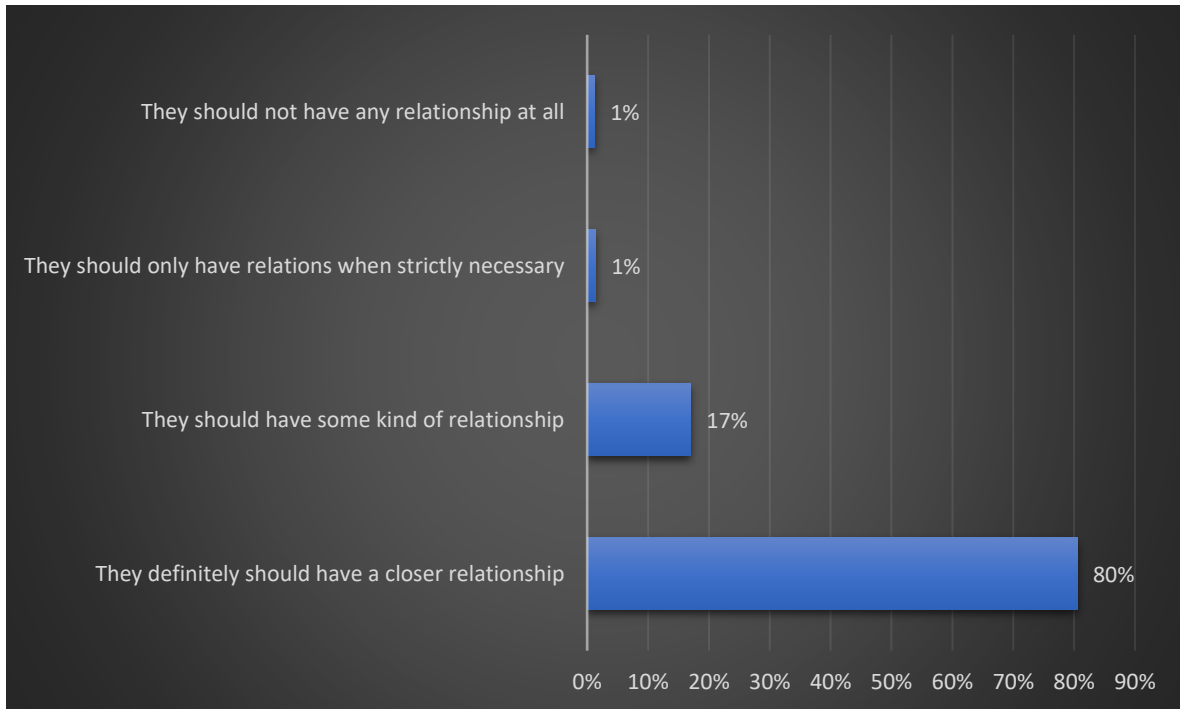


And finally, 53% have a moderately favorable opinion of Mexico and 23% have a highly favorable opinion of Mexico (see Figure 13). Eighty percent said the relationship between the United States and Mexico should be closer (see Figure 14 below).

**Figure 13: What is your opinion of Mexico?**



**Figure 14: Do you think the United States should have or should not have a closer relationship (cooperation) with Mexico?**



## **Conclusions**

---

Arizonan’s opinions with respect to “rebordering” measures show a trend towards important changes. The majority of respondents support free trade and NAFTA, and a majority of the Arizonans surveyed considered Mexico in a positive light. In addition, a majority of respondents look at Mexico as a different country, but not a completely unknown one or as a threat to the United States. At the moment it seems that confrontations and controversial proposals have lost some relevance; the majority’s rejection of the border wall is indicative of this trend. Illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and security in Mexico remain important topics and show that policymakers have much work to do.

Public opinion in Arizona regarding Mexico is currently in a state of flux. Today Arizona is closer to Mexico than most probably realize.

## **Methodology**

---

The survey utilized a complex sampling method that was probabilistic and representative of different regions of Arizona that included 600 telephone interviews with a 95% confidence level and a theoretical error margin of +/- 4.1%. Interviews (in English or, when requested, in Spanish) began on November 7<sup>th</sup> using resident telephone numbers. Telephone numbers were dialed randomly and automatically. The dialing of a home telephone applied only to those over 18 years of age. Sampling was weighted to represent the state's demographics established by the 2016 US Census to the greatest extent possible.

The study was implemented with the support and guidance of Customer Engagement Services LLC and as part of the doctoral research of Victor Remigio Martínez Cantú at CIAD.