

"Most Iowans Oppose More Boat People" Des Moines Register Article, September 30, 1979

MOST IOWANS OPPOSE MORE BOAT PEOPLE

Poll: State's verdict better than national opinion

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Most Iowans are not inclined to welcome the "boat people" with open arms.

A new Iowa Poll shows 51 percent of the citizenry are against resettlement here of refugees now fleeing Southeast Asia. Forty percent approve and 9 percent are undecided.

That verdict appears to be somewhat more favorable than national opinion, as measured by nationwide surveys. But the Iowa Poll indicates a majority harbors some fear, resentment or objection to the influx of newcomers from that war-torn part of the world.

"Having read what I've read about other surveys, I guess I'm not surprised," said Gov. Robert Ray. Earlier this year Ray offered to open Iowa's doors to 1,500 more refugees after watching a television documentary on the plight of the "boat people"—those who have fled by sea to crowded holding camps in Malaysia.

The governor said he did not regret his decision, despite the poll results.

"We have to do what we think is right," he said. "...I think if you look at poll of the sponsors and the employers of the refugees, you'd find a high degree of acceptance."

Survey Results

The survey representatives of all the state's adults, reveals the following

- There is no difference between Iowans' views on bringing the refugees to Iowa and bringing them to the United States. Both are disapproved of by a 5-to-4 margins.
- Only about one of every 10 Iowans thinks this nation should increase the numbers of Indochinese it is willing to admit. By contrast, roughly one of three believes it should admit "no boat people" at all.
- The largest group (38 percent) doesn't think the boat people will have a marked impact on the communities in which they settle. But 29 percent of Iowans believe the newcomers will damage the quality of life in those cities and Iowans; 23 percent think they'll improve it.
- Education has a profound effect on all the poll results. For instance, 60 percent of college-educated persons approve of resettling the refugees in Iowa. That sentiment is shared only by

13 percent of those who did not graduate from high school.

More Welcoming

In real terms, Iowa's reaction to the refugee crisis has been more welcoming than the opinions expressed in the poll.

Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, 3,843 Indochinese have found homes here — one refugee for every 749 Iowans. Of all the nations in the world, according to the governor's office, only Australia has taken in more refugees per person than has Iowa. Of all the states in the nation, only eight others (most of them in milder climates) rank ahead of Iowa.

Whether it's despite that record or because of it, the poll shows Iowans who disapprove of the resettlement have a variety of reasons for doing so.

The most common response is that there are plenty of needy Iowans who deserve first consideration. After that come two conflicting answers: That the refugees take job away from the others and that the refugees are too expensive to support.

Entry-level Jobs

Ray has heard those arguments before in angry letters to his office. But he dismisses all three with the contention that the refugees are industrious and willing to take entry-level jobs that others don't want.

"Here in Iowa," he notes, "we don't have a growing population. And as we attract new businesses and jobs, we can take new people. We have a very low unemployment rate." The governor said that the national leadership of the AFL-CIO and the Iowa leadership of the United Auto Workers have supported refugee resettlement.

But the poll suggests that support does not prevail among labor's rank and file.

The state's blue collar workers solidly disapprove of bringing the Indochinese here (31 percent yes, 62 percent no). But white collar workers solidly approve (54 percent yes, 37 percent no).

Ray still asserted the Iowans "do have a heart" after learning of the poll's findings.

"Forty percent say we can handle it," he noted. "And I would say that many of those who are voting on the negative side, if it were explained to them and fully understood, would reach out too. Their reaction is an expected one ... But you don't take care of your own problems by never taking care of others."

The poll shows most Iowans who approve of admitting the boat people feel that admissions should continue at current levels and not be increased.

Most of those who disapprove say there should be no boat people settling here. However, a third of them say current admissions should be allowed down rather than stopped.

Questions

The poll was conducted Aug. 15-18. The following questions were asked:

Refugees from Indochina, often called "boat people," are seeking new homes in various countries. Do you favor or oppose the resettlement of these refugees in the United States?

Do you favor or oppose the resettlement of these refugees in Iowa?

Why do you feel this way?

If resettled in your community, do you think these people would help or hurt the quality of life there?

Which of the following statements comes closest, to describing how you feel about the boat people?

1. The United States has a moral obligation to help them. It should increase the numbers it is willing to admit.
2. The United States is doing enough now. It should continue admitting boat people at the current levels.
3. The United States is doing too much. It should admit some boat people, but not as many as it is admitting now.
4. The United States has enough problems of its own. It should admit no boat people.

The Iowa Poll, directed by Glenn Roberts, is based on 595 face-to-face, in-home interviews with Iowans ages 13 and older located in 106 sampling points throughout the state. A permanent staff of 68 independent interviewers follows a probability sampling method that eliminates interviewer's choice in selecting persons to be interviewed.

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GRAPHIC

The Iowa Poll/Boat People:
Education Makes A Difference ...

Do you favor or oppose the resettlement of the "boat people" in Iowa?

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
All Iowans	40%	51%	9%
Education: less than high school	23%	69%	8%
Education: high school graduates	35	55	10
Education: some college	60	32	8

...But Iowans Don't Want More

Which of the following statements comes closest, to describing how you feel about the boat people?

The United States has a moral obligation to help them. It should increase the numbers it is willing to admit.	12%
The United States is doing enough now. It should continue admitting boat people at the current levels.	30%
The United States is doing too much. It should admit some boat people, but not as many as it is admitting now.	23%
The United States has enough problems of its own. It should admit no boat people.	30%
Don't Know	5%