

Immigration Reform in the 113th Congress

In July, 2013, the U.S. Senate passed S.744, a historic immigration reform bill that would grant undocumented immigrants legal status and a path to citizenship while strengthening the border. This paper identifies the main forces shaping Senators votes as well as the factors that allowed for consensus in a deeply partisan climate. To do so I look at the history of the bill, the correlations between constituency and vote on immigration, and analyze the important issues that were at stake. I show that an open amendment committee process, bargaining, and an unacceptable status quo helped pass the immigration reform bill with over two-thirds of the vote. Data on districts and voting in the House of Representatives as well as institutional differences between the two chambers help explain the dim prospects for passing immigration reform. This paper provides a model for passing bipartisan legislation that is especially useful given the current polarized political environment.