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Giuliani Shifts His Tone on Immigration

By [MARC SANTORA](#) and [SAM ROBERTS](#)

DES MOINES, April 16 — [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#) is a long way from Ellis Island.

A decade ago, as mayor of New York, Mr. Giuliani used that historic backdrop to champion the cause of immigrants, calling attacks on people who came here legally a blow to “the heart and soul of America.” And from City Hall he often defended illegal immigrants, ordering city workers not to deny them benefits and advocating measures to ease their path to citizenship.

But now he is running for president, and the politics of [immigration](#) in the post-9/11 world is vastly different, with the issue splitting the [Republican Party](#) and voters peppering Mr. Giuliani on the campaign trail with questions about his current thinking. Perhaps more than any other candidate, Mr. Giuliani has a record on immigration with the potential to complicate his bid for the nomination.

In contrast to his years as mayor, when he fought federal efforts to curtail public hospital or educational services to illegal immigrants, he now talks of penalties for people here illegally and requirements for them to wait at the back of the line. And while he once pushed policies like providing schooling for the children of illegal immigrants by saying, “The reality is that they are here, and they’re going to remain here,” now he emphasizes denying amnesty.

In the 1990s, Mr. Giuliani saw the city’s great number of immigrants as integral to the work force and a politically potent key to the resurgence of a struggling New York. Now, his aides say that his basic thinking has not changed, but that his emphasis has shifted to reflect the times.

“Immigration reform has to begin with border security because we are a nation at war,” said Anthony V. Carbonetti, a senior political adviser who has worked with Mr. Giuliani for 15 years. “He is still very proud that people want to come to this country.”

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For now, Mr. Giuliani is relying on his reputation as a law-and-order mayor to convince voters that he will crack down on illegal immigration. He also sprinkles his comments with nods to his past statements, saying he would welcome immigrants willing to learn the language, respect the culture and follow the law.

As he campaigned across the country in recent weeks, Mr. Giuliani, whose grandparents came from Italy, never brought up the subject of immigration unprompted, but voters have kept the issue before him. In his first extensive town hall meeting here in Iowa last Saturday, he was asked twice about his views. And other Republican candidates are also pressing the issue.

At the annual Lincoln Day dinner here last Saturday, Representative [Tom Tancredo](#), Republican of Colorado, received some of the loudest applause from the 1,000 party loyalists in attendance as he railed against illegal immigrants.

“We are destroying the concept of citizenship itself,” Mr. Tancredo said. “America, and indeed Western civilization, are in a crisis.”

Without mentioning him by name, he took Mr. Giuliani to task for past policies that have “encouraged more illegals to cross our borders.”

When Mr. Giuliani was asked to clarify his views on immigration at the town meeting, he emphasized enforcing the law but stayed away from any kind of blanket condemnation of illegal immigrants.

Mr. Giuliani’s approach is similar to the one proposed by President Bush, advocating an orderly flow of immigrants by providing a clear path to citizenship and thereby easing the pressure at the border.

Like Mr. Bush, Mr. Giuliani emphasizes the need for tough border controls. He said he wanted to help those who are already in America become citizens, but he is quick to highlight that he is not in favor of amnesty, which leading Republican candidates dare not endorse.

“First thing is, there should be no amnesty,” Mr. Giuliani said in response to a reporter’s question in Atlanta recently. Amnesty means varying things to various candidates. For Mr. Giuliani, it means no blanket forgiveness of illegal status.

Immigration has been a difficult issue for all the major Republican candidates, and they have responded to it in notably different ways.

[Mitt Romney](#), the former Massachusetts governor, was the only one of the three leading Republican contenders to mention the issue at the Lincoln Day dinner, pressing an increasingly restrictive view.

Senator [John McCain](#), Republican of Arizona, who until recently joined Senator [Edward M. Kennedy](#), Democrat of Massachusetts, in pushing for a compromise in overhauling immigration, has moved away from a lead role on the issue in the Senate.

In Mr. Giuliani’s case, his aides acknowledged that most voters do not know how aggressive he was as mayor in pressing for ways to allow more immigrants into the country.

It was a role he seemed to cherish, becoming a national leader for the cause of welcoming immigrants in the 1990s. To the surprise of many people in both parties, he also spoke passionately about helping those here illegally become citizens, advocating for \$12 million to start a city agency that would assist those seeking citizenship. He vigorously defended the city’s policy of forbidding city employees, including police and hospital workers, from asking a person’s immigration status.

As other anti-immigration movements spread across the country in 1990s, Mr. Giuliani consistently pushed back. “The anti-immigration issue that’s now sweeping the country in my view is no different than the movements that swept the country in the past,” he said in 1996. “You look back at the Chinese Exclusionary Act, or the Know-Nothing movement — these were movements that encouraged Americans to fear foreigners, to fear something that is different, and to stop immigration.”

These days, when he says he opposes amnesty, Mr. Giuliani says he does not mean that the millions of people here illegally should be deported, but rather, that they should have to earn their citizenship and that nothing should be accorded automatically.

On the campaign trail, he says the first order of business must be to try to identify the 12 million immigrants who are here illegally and issue them “tamper-proof” identification cards.

Then, he said, they should start paying taxes. If they want to become citizens, they should have to “get on the back of the line,” he said.

“And then, at the end of the line, if they are ever going to become citizens,” he said, “the thing I am really interested in, they have to read English, write English, speak English and be able to understand the basics of American civics.”

Mr. Giuliani has been wrestling with immigration issues since well before he was mayor. When he worked in the Justice Department under President [Ronald Reagan](#), he defended the administration’s policy of keeping thousands of Haitian refugees in detention centers and denying them asylum.

When he first ran for mayor in 1989, with immigration a potent subject in city politics, Mr. Giuliani moved quickly to distance himself from that policy, and embraced a role as both a spokesman and protector of new immigrants through his power as mayor.

Jack Martin, special projects director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which lobbies for strict immigration enforcement, said that in Mr. Giuliani’s case, many of his organization’s 250,000 members and advocates “certainly are aware of the statements he has made in the past, extolling the virtues of immigrants in general and illegal immigrants to the economy of New York City.”

These days, Mr. Giuliani frames the issue as one of national security. But as he talks about immigration on the campaign trail, Mr. Giuliani suggests that his core beliefs have not changed much since his days as mayor, often quoting a speech [Abraham Lincoln](#) gave in the 1850s.

“He made a beautiful speech in which he said the best American is not the American who has been here the longest or the one who just arrived,” Mr. Giuliani said recently. “It is the one who understands the principles of America the best because we are a country held together by ideas.”

Marc Santora reported from Des Moines, and Sam Roberts from New York.

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