

## Most Americans Disagree with Trump and the Republican Base on Immigration Policies

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Immigration has ignited debate in the United States since the colonial period, even before the establishment of the republic. Since US President Donald Trump's return to the White House, the issue has reemerged as one of the nation's most salient. The current administration has made immigration a signature focus, deporting large numbers of undocumented immigrants and increasing restrictions on legal immigrants in an effort to reshape the US immigration system.

Yet a Chicago Council-Ipsos survey fielded April 24-26, 2026, shows that most Americans are not on board with this crackdown. Majorities express positive views of immigrants and favor granting some sort of legal status to undocumented immigrants. That said, Republicans diverge from the herd with largely negative views about the impacts of immigration. While this represents a minority viewpoint, Republican base support for current immigration policies suggests GOP leaders have little incentive to shift course.

### Key Findings

- Six in 10 Americans say immigration has a positive impact on American culture (61%), the national economy (60%), their local economy (62%), and their community (60%).
- Six in 10 or more Americans think it is important for prospective immigrants to possess skills needed in the United States, speak English, have family members with American citizenship, or have private sponsorship before being admitted to the country.
- Two-thirds or more of Americans support granting asylum to refugees displaced by war and political instability (68%), climate disasters (66%),

persecution of political beliefs (65%), and racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination (64%).

- Asked about undocumented immigration, two-thirds of Americans favor allowing immigrants currently in the United States without legal authorization a chance to either apply for citizenship provided they meet certain requirements (51%) or be granted legal status that is short of citizenship (16%). Three in 10 believe undocumented immigrants should be identified and deported (30%). Seven in 10 also support granting permanent legal status to “Dreamers.”
- On most of these measures, there are stark partisan divides. Republicans tend to see negative cultural, economic, and community impacts from immigration; favor deportation over allowing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants; and oppose more than support permanent status for Dreamers. They are somewhat divided on whether racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination are valid reasons to grant refugee asylum.

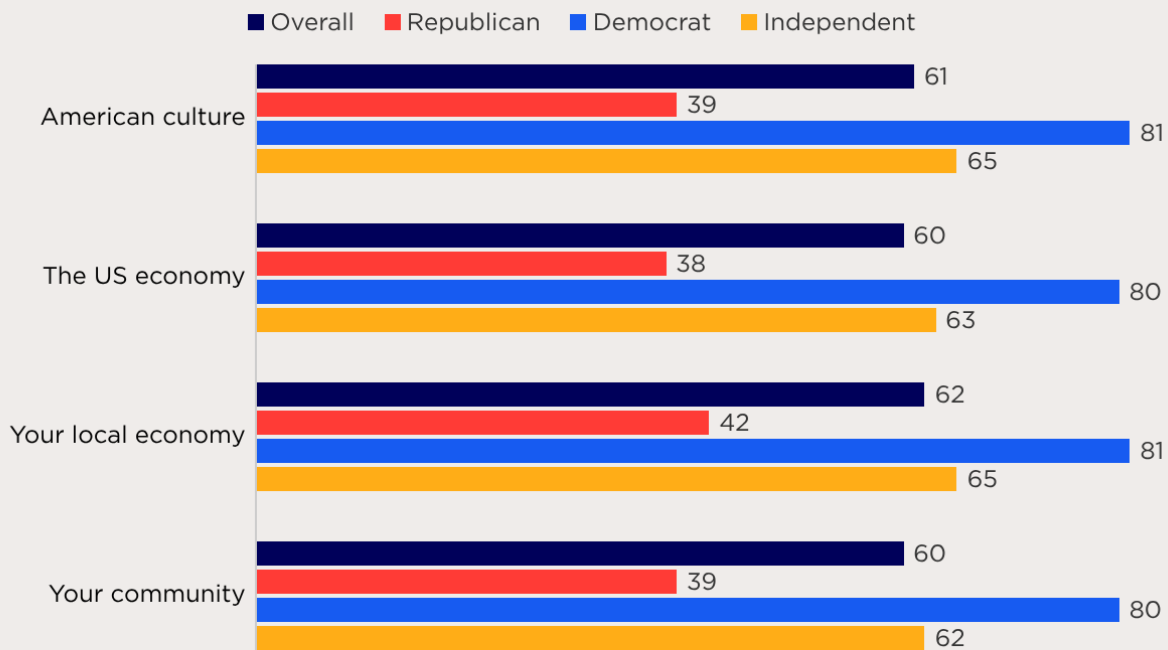
### Six in 10 Americans Say Immigration is Good for the Country

Over the past 50 years, there has been a large increase in the foreign-born population in the United States. Between [1970 and 2022](#), the immigrant population increased from 9.6 million (4.7% of total population) to approximately 46.2 million (13.9%). As of June 2025, the [Pew Research Center](#) estimates that nearly 52 million immigrants live in the United States—15.4 percent of all US residents, down from a recent historic peak of 15.8 percent. This decrease resulted from several policy changes during the Biden and second Trump presidencies. US President Joe Biden tightened [restrictions on asylum applications](#) in June 2024, and in his first 100 days, Trump issued [181 executive actions](#) on immigration to stem the entry of new immigrants and deport undocumented migrants.

Whether Americans perceive immigrants as contributing more or taking away from US society and economy has been a point of contention for decades. The US public as a whole tends to think immigrants provide more benefits. Majorities believe immigration has a positive impact on American culture (61%), the national economy (60%), their local economies (62%), and their own communities (60%). However, about four in 10 disagree, saying immigration has had a negative impact on each of these dimensions.

# Impact of Immigration

Do you think immigration has a positive or negative impact on...? (% positive)



April 24-26, 2026 | n=1,022

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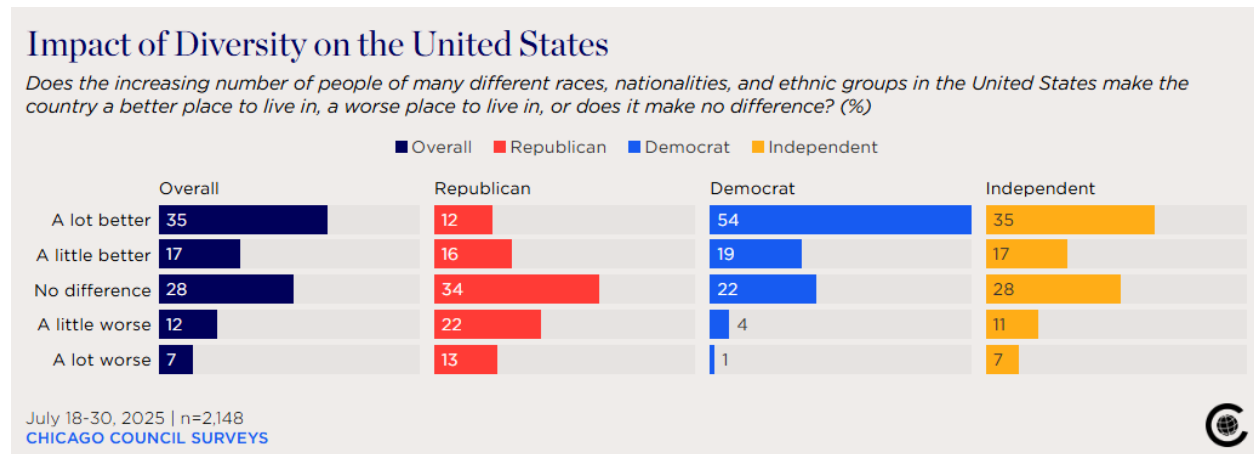


Self-described Democrats and Independents diverge sharply from Republicans on this question. Eight in 10 Democrats and about two-thirds of Independents say immigration has had positive impacts on American society, economy, and communities, compared to just four in 10 Republicans.

Republicans who consider themselves to be supporters of the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement (three-quarters of all Republicans, according to these data) are considerably more negative than other Republicans (see appendix tables 1-2). Roughly a third of MAGA Republicans think immigration has had positive impacts on these dimensions, compared to half or more of non-MAGA Republicans (who range from 53% saying immigration has had a positive effect on culture to 58% who say the same about their community).

Differing impressions of immigrant contributions to US society and commerce reflect a fundamental split about the American melting pot. The [2025 Chicago Council Survey](#) found that seven in 10 Democrats said people of many different races, nationalities, and ethnic groups makes the country a better place to live (71%, including 54% who say it makes it a *much* better place). Half of Independents (52%) also believed that diversity makes the country better. By contrast, just 28 percent of Republicans believed diversity makes

the United States a better place to live. The bulk of Republicans were divided between those who believe it makes the country worse (35%) or are indifferent (34%).



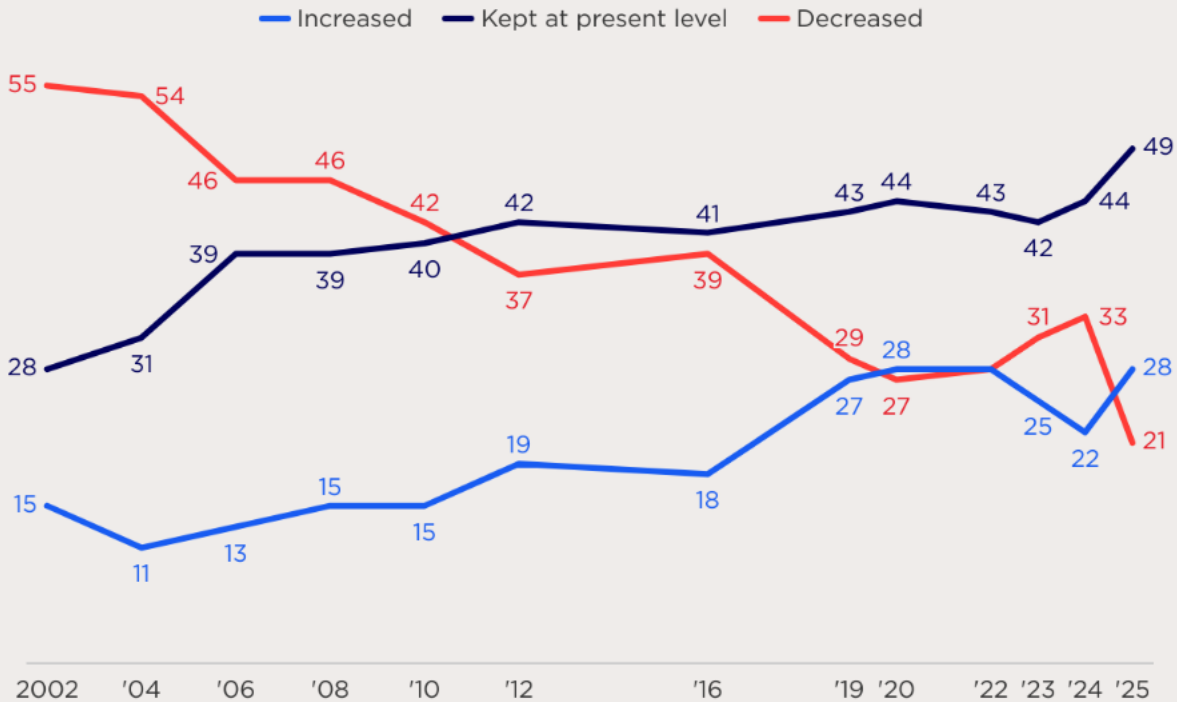
## Support for Legal Immigration Hits All-Time High in 2025

While unauthorized immigrants have been the primary target of the Trump administration’s immigration policies, legal immigration has also been affected by [bureaucratic backlogs and policy shifts](#).

Americans have expressed increased appreciation for legal immigrants, perhaps in reaction to some of the administration’s enforcement policies, which a majority characterize as [going too far](#). In July 2025, support for legal immigration hit an all-time high since the Chicago Council Survey’s first reading in 2002. More than three-quarters of Americans said legal immigration to the United States should be kept at its present level (49%, up from 44% in 2024) or increased (28%, up from 22% in 2024). Similar proportions of Republicans (52%), Independents (48%), and Democrats (47%) supported maintaining the present level of legal immigration.

## Record Support for Legal Immigration

Should legal immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased? (%)



July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148  
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But partisans differed on increasing legal immigration, with 40 percent of Democrats, 29 percent of Independents, and just 13 percent of Republicans in favor of this option. Republicans were most likely to prefer decreasing legal immigration (34%, compared to 20% of Independents and 11% of Democrats).

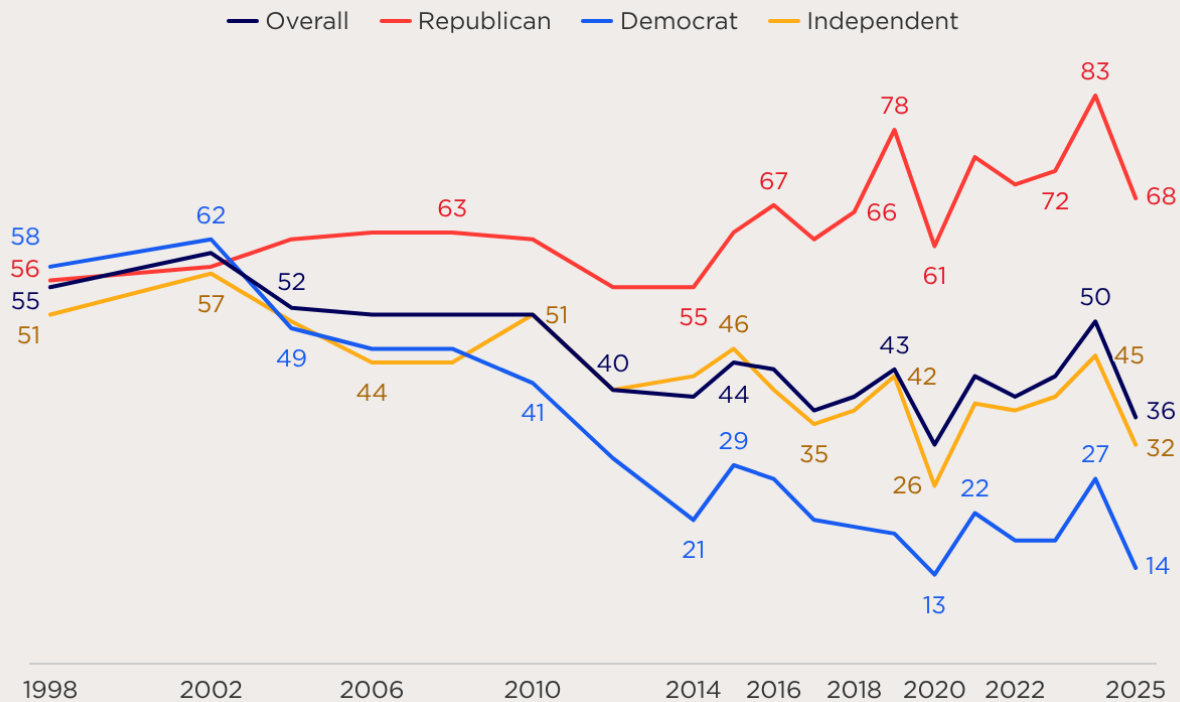
At the same time, fewer Americans viewed “large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States” as a critical threat to the country in 2025 (36%) than 2024 (50%). When first asked in 1998, all three partisan groups expressed similar levels of concern about immigration as a critical threat. But over nearly a three-decade span, [increasing diversity and educational attainment](#) among Democratic Party supporters may have impacted their opinions, along with some Independents.

Though a majority of Republicans still believed immigration to be a critical threat—and a top threat among other potential items—GOP concern was significantly down from the prior year (68% in 2025 compared to 83% in

2024). In fact, threat perceptions of immigration dropped across the board. There are large differences within the Republican Party supporters, however. Eight in 10 MAGA Republicans described immigration as a critical threat compared to 42 percent of non-MAGA Republicans.

## Critical Threat of Immigration

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interests of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. **Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US** (% critical threat)



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## Skills and Speaking English Considered Requirements to Immigrate

When asked in 2026 about a series of potential criteria for deciding whether applicants for immigration to the United States should be accepted, Americans consider possessing skills needed in the country as most important (81%, 42% very important). Second-most important is the ability to speak English (71%, 39% very important), followed by having private sponsors to petition for them (60%, 21% very important), not using social benefits (60%, 31% very important), and having family members in the country with

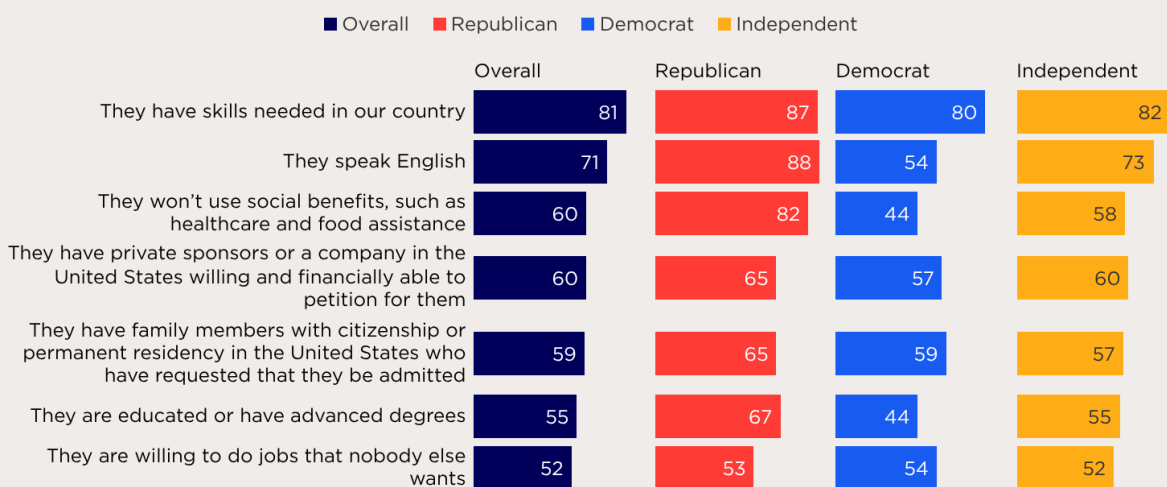
citizenship or residency (59%, 21% very important).<sup>1</sup> Somewhat fewer emphasize being educated or having advanced degrees (55%, 18% very important) and willingness to take jobs others do not want (52%, 20% very important).

There is broad agreement on these requirements across party lines. At least eight in 10 Republicans, Democrats, and Independents consider possession of needed skills an important criterion. At least six in 10 across political stripes say it is important for family members with legal status or private sponsors to request an applicant be admitted, and more than half say it is important that prospective immigrants are willing to do jobs others do not want.

At the same time, majorities of Republicans (82%) and Independents (58%) think it is important that immigrants won't use social benefits. Fewer than half of Democrats (44%) say the same. And while majorities of Republicans (67%) and Independents (55%) say it is important that prospective immigrants have advanced education, just 44 percent of Democrats agree.

## Immigrant Admission Criteria

*As you may know, the US government has criteria for deciding whether applicants for immigration should be accepted. How important is it that immigrants to the US meet the following attributes? (% important)*



April 24-26, 2026 | n=1,022  
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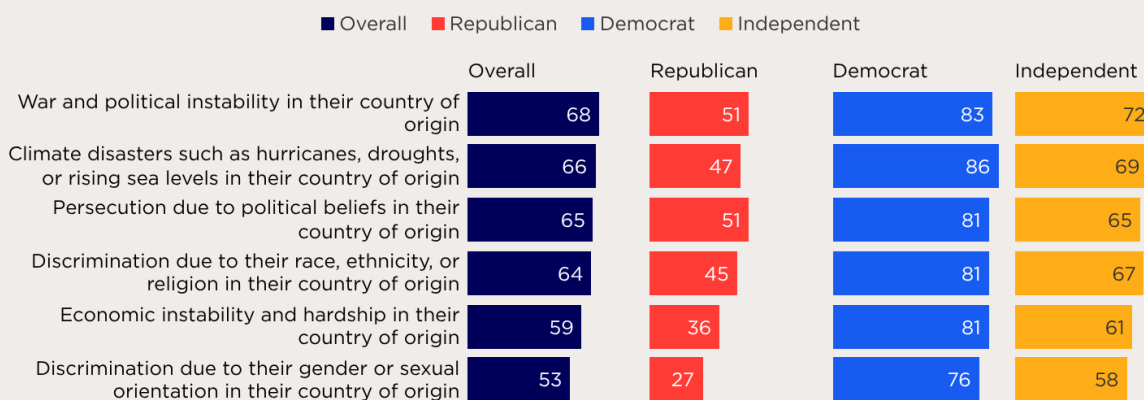
## Most Americans Favor Asylum for Immigrants Fleeing Instability, Climate Disasters, and Discrimination

<sup>1</sup>[Pew's analysis](#) of census data found immigrants to this country were less educated than native-born Americans and about half speak English very well or speak only English in their homes.

Regardless of partisan affiliation, Americans support immigrants coming to the United States as refugees. At least two-thirds overall support granting asylum to refugees displaced from war and political instability (68%), climate disasters (66%), persecution of political beliefs (65%), and racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination (64%). Smaller majorities support accepting refugees due to economic instability in their country of origin (59%) or because of discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation (53%).

## Reasons for Accepting Refugees

*Do you support or oppose the United States accepting refugees for the following reasons? (% support)*



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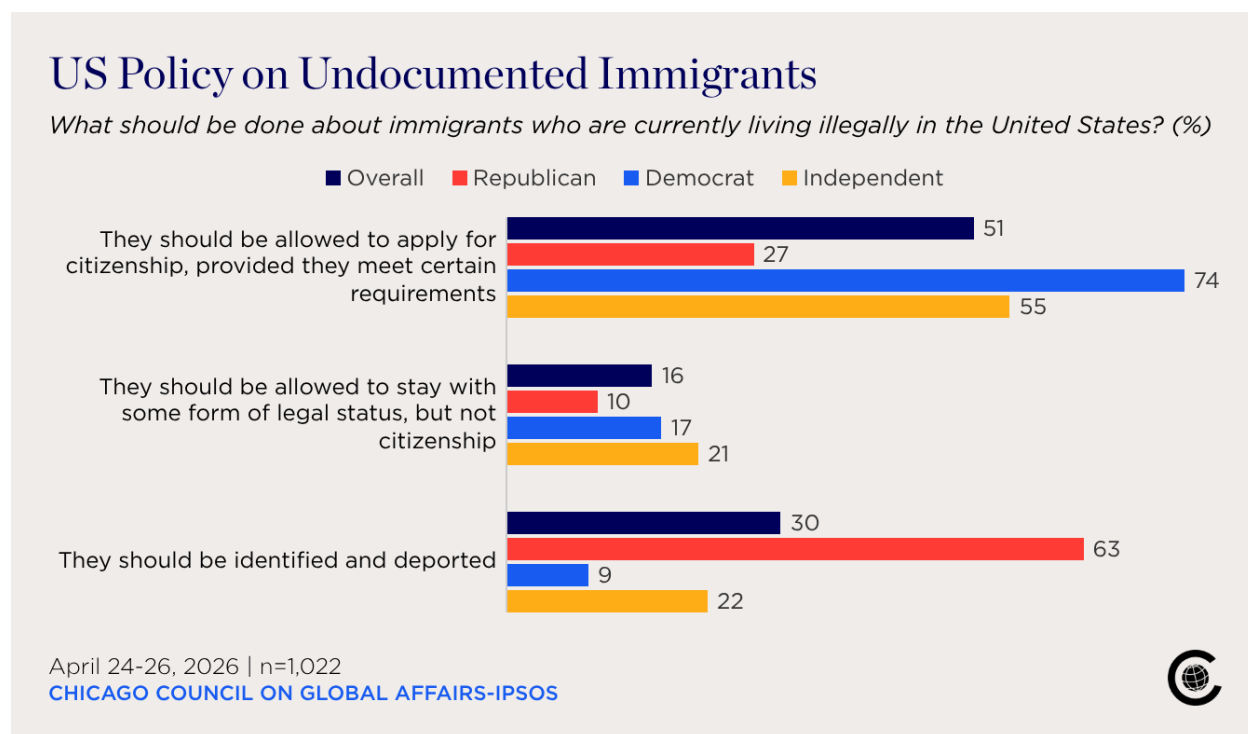
Solid majorities of Democrats and Independents support opening US doors for asylum seekers for each of these reasons (on average, 81% for Democrats and 65% for Independents). About half of Republicans support accepting refugees fleeing war and political instability (51%), climate disasters (47%), racial discrimination (45%), and religious persecution (51%). But they are less sympathetic to reasons related to economic instability (36%) or discrimination because of gender or sexual orientation (27%, for an overall average of 43%).

MAGA Republicans are driving overall Republican attitudes on this measure (see appendix table 3). No more than half of MAGA Republicans favor granting asylum for any of these reasons, especially objecting accepting those fleeing discrimination due to gender or sexual orientation (only 21% support). By contrast, six in 10 or more non-MAGA Republicans support granting asylum due to conflict, climate disasters, discrimination due to ethnic, racial or religious reasons, and persecution of political beliefs. But just four in 10 non-MAGA Republicans favor granting asylum to those facing discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation and economic hardship.

## Plurality Say Undocumented Immigrants Should Be Placed on a Path to Citizenship

As of 2023, [14 million immigrants](#) lacked full legal status in the United States—a record high, though about 40 percent had some form of temporary protection from deportation or a work permit. This number has likely declined due to the Trump administration’s policies and enforcement measures.

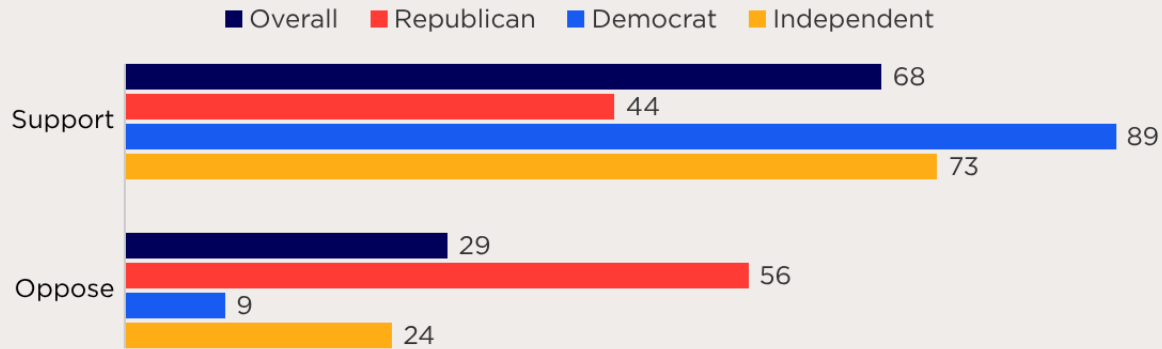
The American public overall is inclined to allow those immigrants currently in the United States without legal authorization a chance to apply for citizenship provided they meet certain requirements (51%), while another 16 percent saying they should be able to remain with legal status that is short of citizenship. In essence, a combined total of 67 percent prefer that undocumented immigrants be allowed to stay in the country. By contrast, three in 10 believe they should be identified and deported.



In a similar vein, nearly seven in 10 overall say they would support a law granting permanent legal status to immigrants who were brought to the United States illegally as children, commonly referred to as “Dreamers” (68%). At least 20 legislative proposals for a DREAM Act have been presented to Congress that would permanently grant immigrants who were brought to the United States as children a pathway to citizenship. None have yet been passed by both the House and Senate.

## Passing a Law for Dreamers

*As you may know, many immigrants who were illegally brought to the United States as children, sometimes called “Dreamers,” now have temporary legal immigration status that may be ending soon. Would you support or oppose Congress passing a law granting them permanent legal immigration status? (%)*



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As on most immigration questions posed to the public, there are vast differences in attitudes between Republicans and others. Majorities of both Democrats (74%) and Independents (55%) favor citizenship for undocumented immigrants as well as permanent status for Dreamers (89% Democrats, 73% Independents). Meanwhile, a majority of GOP supporters prefer to deport the undocumented (63%) and oppose granting legal status for Dreamers (56%, compared to 44% support). While two-thirds of MAGA Republicans favor deportation (67%) above other options, non-MAGA Republicans are closely divided between deporting undocumented immigrants (51%) and either offering a pathway to citizenship (36%) or legal status (13%, for a combined total of 49% offering some legal standing) (see appendix tables 4-5).

### Age, Ethnicity, Education, and Region Play a Role in Immigration Attitudes

While partisanship is the strongest factor shaping US public attitudes on immigration, it is not the only one. Data analysis suggests education, age, region of residence, and ethnic background influence how Americans see immigration impacting the United States and the best course of action for immigration policy. In general, urban dwellers, those who are college-educated, younger Americans, and non-White Americans tend to view immigration more positively and are more willing to accept immigrants and refugees than older Americans, White Americans, less-educated respondents, and rural residents. They are also more supportive of providing unauthorized

immigrants currently living in the United States with pathways to pursue citizenship or legal residence and granting Dreamers permanent legal immigration status.

There are also regional distinctions. Americans residing on the West Coast tend to be more likely than those from other parts of the country to see immigration as a positive force, more willing to accept immigrants and refugees, and more supportive of pathways to citizenship. Of course, these demographic characteristics are closely intertwined with partisan affiliation.

## Conclusion

For decades, Emma Lazarus' words on the Statue of Liberty—"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—were a symbol of opportunity for new immigrants reaching American shores. While bipartisan majorities are willing to grant asylum to refugees fleeing conflict and political persecution, Americans prefer to receive immigrants who are skilled experts, fluent English speakers, and self-sufficient. Those expressing broadly anti-immigrant attitudes [might base them on nativist leanings](#) or perceived fears of diluting American culture, most clearly evidenced by Republican concerns on this issue.

Angst over immigration could also reflect a perceived competition over resources for [housing, jobs,](#) and social services, especially when American [consumer confidence](#) has weakened. While concerns about housing shortages, employment, and household economics are [valid,](#) immigration critics sometimes [exaggerate](#) the extent to which migrants exacerbate these structural problems. Immigrants have helped the United States achieve economic gains by [enlarging the workforce, raising consumer demand, and offsetting the economic effects of an aging population.](#) [Research](#) around immigration's economic impact on the United States shows it to be a primarily positive effect,

The data from this Chicago Council-Ipsos public opinion survey paint a picture of an American public that broadly views the cultural, societal, and economic impacts of immigration to be positive. A majority of Americans would prefer maintaining or increasing legal immigration. Most would prefer to offer a form of legal status to undocumented immigrants rather than deporting them, particularly the Dreamers. These prevailing views stand in stark contrast to the immigration policies being carried out in the United States today.

## Appendix

### Appendix Table 1

*When it comes to political matters, do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Make America Great Again or MAGA movement?*

Republican Divisions (%)			
Republican	MAGA Republican	Non-MAGA Republican	MAGA - non-MAGA gap
30	74	12	62

### Appendix Table 2

*QCB2. Do you think immigration has a positive or negative impact on:*

Impact of Immigration (% positive)				
	Republican	MAGA Republican	Non-MAGA Republican	MAGA - non-MAGA gap
American culture	39	34	53	-19
The US economy	38	32	54	-22
Your local economy	42	36	56	-20
Your community	39	31	58	-27

### Appendix Table 3

*QCB6. Do you support or oppose the United States accepting refugees for the following reasons?*

Reasons for Accepting Refugees (% support)				
	Republican	MAGA Republican	Non-MAGA Republican	MAGA - non-MAGA gap
War and political instability in their country of origin	51	48	62	-14
Climate disasters such as hurricanes, droughts, or rising sea levels	47	43	59	-16
Discrimination due to their race,	45	39	64	-25

ethnicity, or religion in their country of origin				
Discrimination due to their gender or sexual orientation in their country of origin	27	21	42	-21
Persecution due to political beliefs in their country of origin	51	46	67	-21
Economic instability and hardship in their country of origin	36	35	39	-4

#### Appendix Table 4

*What should be done about immigrants who are currently living illegally in the United States?*

Policy Toward Immigrants Living Illegally in the US (%)				
	Republican	MAGA Republican	Non-MAGA Republican	MAGA - non-MAGA gap
They should be allowed to apply for citizenship, provided they meet certain requirements	27	24	36	-12
They should be allowed to stay with some form of legal status, but not citizenship	10	8	13	-5
They should be identified and deported	63	67	51	16

## Appendix Table 5

*As you may know, many immigrants who were illegally brought to the United States as children, sometimes called “Dreamers,” now have temporary legal immigration status that may be ending soon. Would you support or oppose Congress passing a law granting them permanent legal immigration status?*

Passing a Law for Dreamers (%)				
	Republican	MAGA Republican	Non-MAGA Republican	MAGA - non-MAGA gap
Support	44	39	57	-18
Oppose	56	61	43	18

## Methodology

This analysis is based on a poll conducted for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs by Ipsos from April 13-23, 2026, using its large-scale, nationwide, probability-based online research panel, KnowledgePanel. The study was fielded in English among a weighted national sample of 1,022 adults age 18 or older. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, for results based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.06.

The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income. The demographic benchmarks came from the 2025 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Party ID benchmarks are from the adjusted 2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS).

Specific categories used were:

- Gender (Male, Female) by Age (18-29, 30-44, 45-59 and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic Ethnicity (White Non-Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, Other Non-Hispanic, Hispanic 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor or higher)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan status (Metro, Non-Metro)
- Household Income (Under \$25,000, \$25,000-\$49,999, \$50,000-\$74,999, \$75,000-\$99,999, \$100,000-\$149,999, \$150,000+)

- Party ID (Republican, Leans Republican, Independent/Other, Democrat, Leans Democrat)

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Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974.