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Memo: National Survey Findings on Trump's Immigration Policies and Their Effect on His 2024 Coalition

To: Interested parties
From: G. Elliott Morris, Wave Polling and Research
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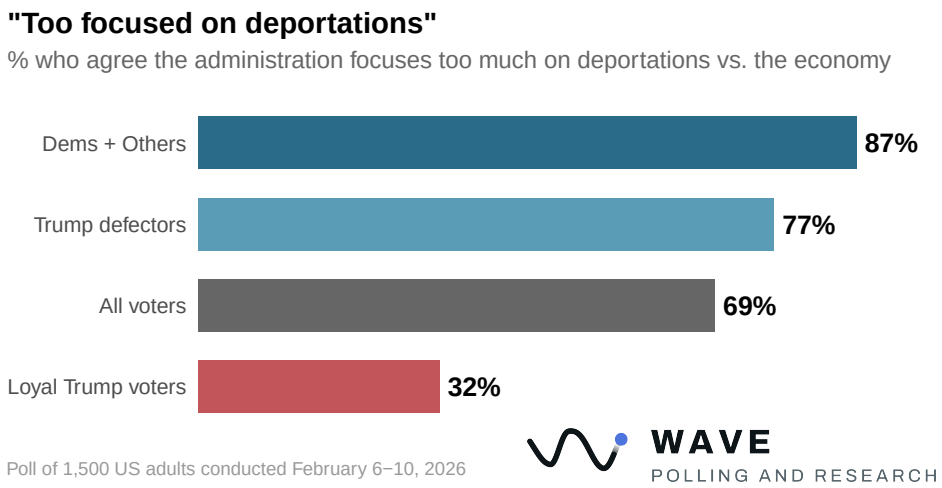
Seven in ten Americans say the Trump administration is focusing too much on deportations and not enough on the economy. A new national survey of 1,500 adults finds that immigration enforcement is eroding the Republican Party's image, driving voters away from the GOP coalition, and opening a lane for Democrats to improve their own standing. Key findings:

1. Voters say the Trump administration has the wrong priorities.

69% of Americans agree that the Trump administration is focusing too much on deportations and not enough on fixing the economy, inflation, and the rising cost of living. This view is shared across the political spectrum: 87% of non-Trump voters, 77% of Trump defectors, and 32% of loyal Trump voters agree with the statement. The sentiment is especially pronounced among first-generation Americans: 83% of respondents with both parents born abroad agree, compared with 66% of those with U.S.-born parents.

(Trump defectors are people who said they voted for Trump in 2024 and now say they will vote for a Democrat in Congress, or are not sure who they will vote for.)



When Americans are asked which issues are the most important to their vote in 2026, inflation and the cost of living (26%) is the most commonly cited top issue, followed by democracy and elections (15%), jobs and the economy (14%), and deportations/immigration enforcement (12%).

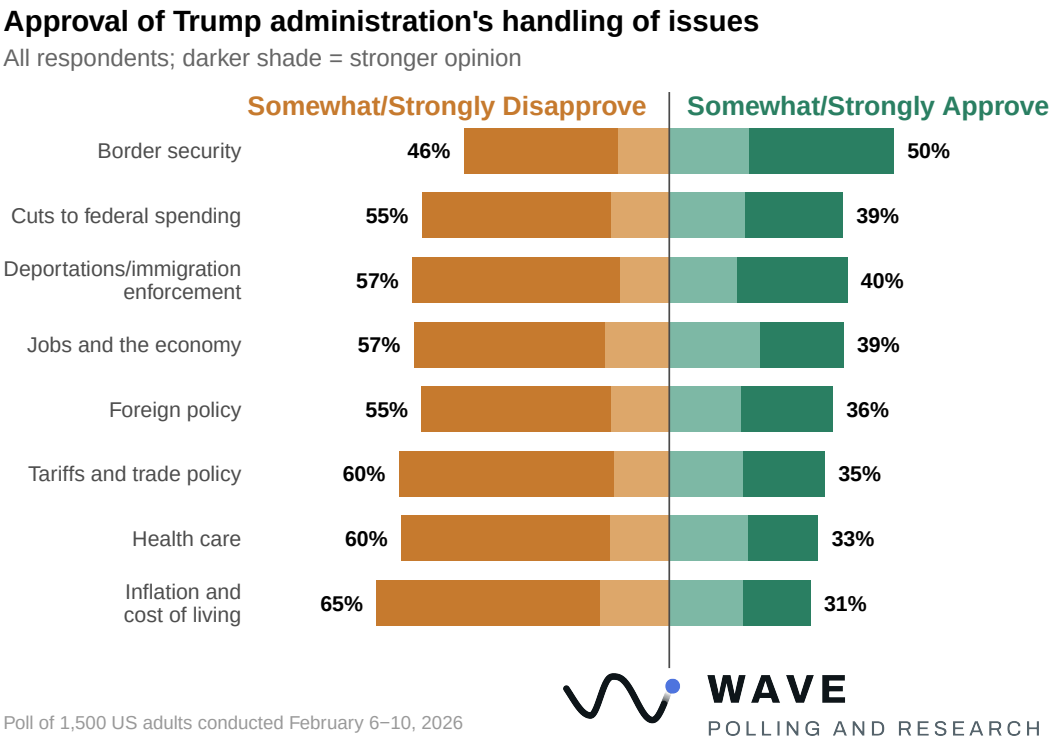
2. Immigration enforcement is a net negative for Republicans.

The Trump administration's immigration policies are pushing more voters away from the Republican Party than they are attracting:

- Overall, only **40%** approve of the administration's handling of deportations while 57% disapprove. Among Trump defectors, just 32% approve and 65% disapprove.
- **35%** say immigration enforcement makes them less likely to vote Republican, versus 26% who say more likely.

- **35%** say ICE deployments to cities make them less likely to vote Republican, versus 25% who say more likely.

Among Trump defectors specifically, 54% say immigration enforcement makes them less likely to vote Republican, and 54% say the same of ICE deployments. The pattern also reveals an intra-coalition split among Trump's own 2024 voters: 46% of Latino Trump voters agree the administration is too focused on deportations, compared with 35% of White Trump voters. On deportation handling, only 40% of Latino Trump voters strongly approve, versus 57% of White Trump voters. The age gradient is also notable: among 18–29 year-olds, 28% say immigration enforcement makes them "much less likely" to vote Republican, and 22% say they would never vote Republican — double the rate among those 65 and older (11%).



3. ICE deployments rank as the third-largest driver of disaffection among 2024 Trump voters.

Roughly 14% of the voters Donald Trump won in 2024 now say they will not vote for a Republican in Congress this November. What is driving them away from the party?

We asked the Trump defectors in our sample why their opinion of the president had changed. ICE deployments rank third among nine factors tested:

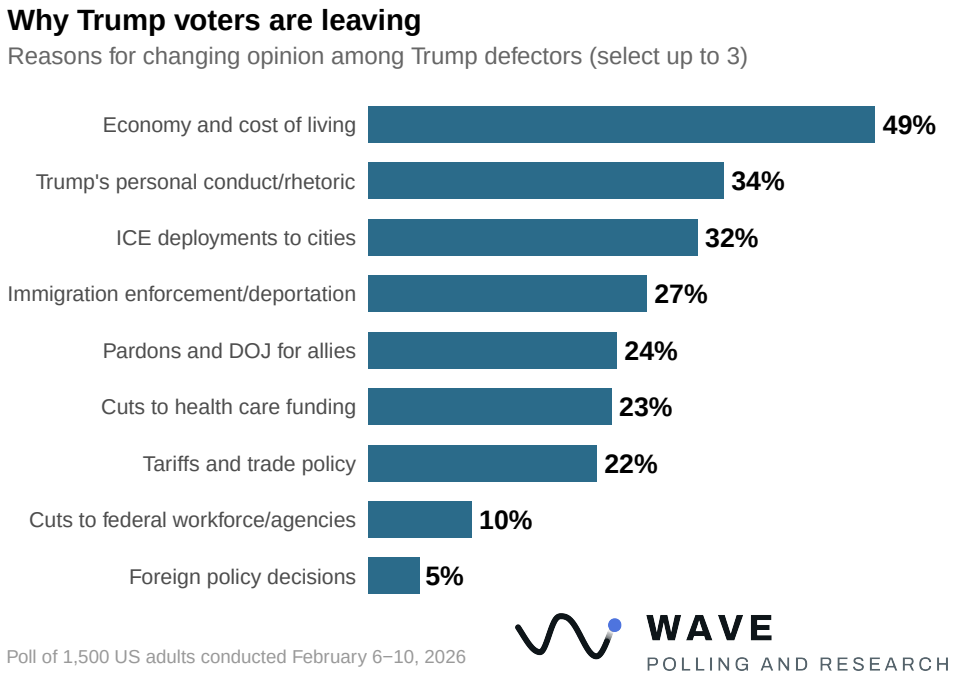
- Economy and cost of living (49%)
- Trump's personal conduct and rhetoric (34%)
- ICE deployments to cities (32%)
- Immigration enforcement and deportation policies (27%)
- Pardons and use of the DOJ for allies (24%)
- Cuts to health care funding (23%)
- Tariffs and trade policy (22%)

ICE deployments to cities ranks third among nine factors tested, and immigration enforcement/deportation ranks fourth. These findings undercut the assumption that enforcement policy enjoys broad support among the party's own 2024 voters.

Who are these defectors? Three traits stand out relative to loyal Trump voters:

- **Younger**: Median age 40 vs. 54; 62% are under 45 (vs. 37%).
- **More diverse**: 54% White non-Hispanic (vs. 76%); 25% Hispanic/Latino (vs. 15%).
- **More urban**: 64% live in urban or suburban areas (vs. 51%); just 36% are rural (vs. 49%).

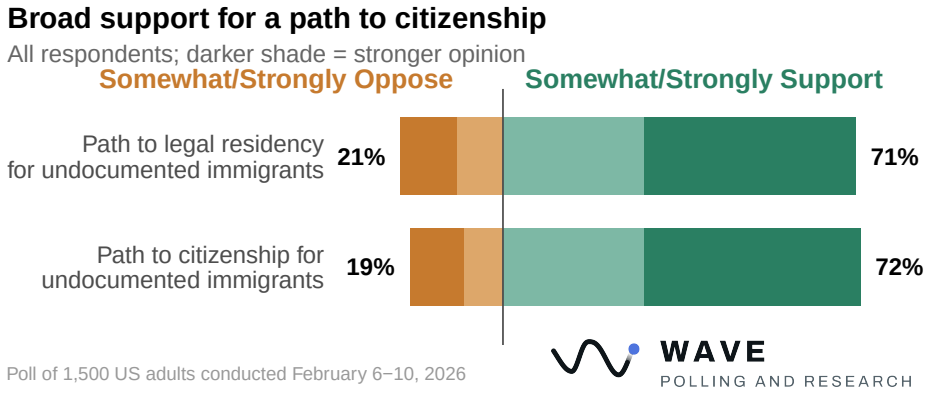
The two groups are similar on education (36% hold a bachelor's degree or higher in each) and gender (45% women vs. 43%).



4. Large majorities support a path to citizenship and legal status.

Public opinion on immigration policy proposals diverges sharply from the administration's agenda:

- **72%** support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in the U.S. (44% strongly).
- **71%** support a path to legal residency under the same conditions — nearly identical to the citizenship figure.



5. The Republican Party's image has deteriorated.

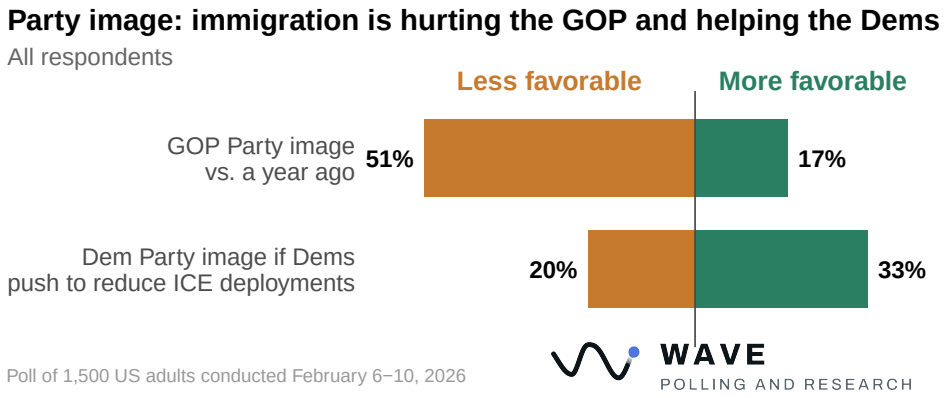
A majority of Americans (51%) say they view the Republican Party less favorably than a year ago, compared with 17% who say more favorably. The Democratic Party's image is also negative on balance — 38% less favorable versus 20% more favorable — but the GOP's decline is significantly steeper.

The decline is driven in part by erosion within Trump's 2024 coalition: 14% of 2024 Trump voters say they would vote Democratic or are undecided and not leaning Republican — a group we label "Trump defectors." Two-thirds

of these defectors say they would vote for the Democratic candidate; the remaining third are still undecided.

If the Trump administration were to moderate its immigration enforcement — for example, by reducing federal agent deployments to major cities — 14% of Americans say their opinion of the Republican Party would improve, while 11% say it would worsen.

One-third of Americans (33%) say they would view the Democratic Party more favorably if its leaders pressed the administration to reduce federal agent deployments to cities.



About Wave Polling and Research

Wave Polling and Research is a survey research and strategic consulting firm founded by G. Elliott Morris. The firm provides data-driven research and advising for clients working in politics, media, and public policy. Wave Polling and Research emphasizes methodological transparency, rigorous survey design, and a commitment to letting the data speak for itself. For more information, visit wavepolling.com.

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Methodology

This survey was designed by Wave Polling and Research and fielded online from February 6 to February 10, 2026 among a sample of 1,500 U.S. adults aged 18 and older. The fielding and weighting was performed by Verasight, a mixed-mode survey provider. The margin of sampling error is ±2.5 percentage points.

Recruitment and data quality

Respondents were recruited via email from the Verasight Community, which draws its members through random address-based sampling, random text messaging, and dynamic online targeting. Verasight is a member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative. Identity was verified through multi-step authentication including SMS response and Google reCAPTCHA v3. Post-collection quality checks included IP address verification, duplicate detection, non-human response detection, attention checks, straight-lining checks, and removal of responses completed in less than 30% of median completion time.

Weighting

Verasight weighted the final sample to match the December 2025 Current Population Survey on age, race/ethnicity, sex, income, education, region, and metropolitan status, as well as to a running three-year average of partisanship distributions from the Pew Research Center NPORS benchmarking surveys and population benchmarks of 2024 vote.