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Wrong Priorities: Deportations and Affordability Are Both Eroding Trump's 2024 Coalition

To: Interested parties
From: G. Elliott Morris, Wave Polling and Research
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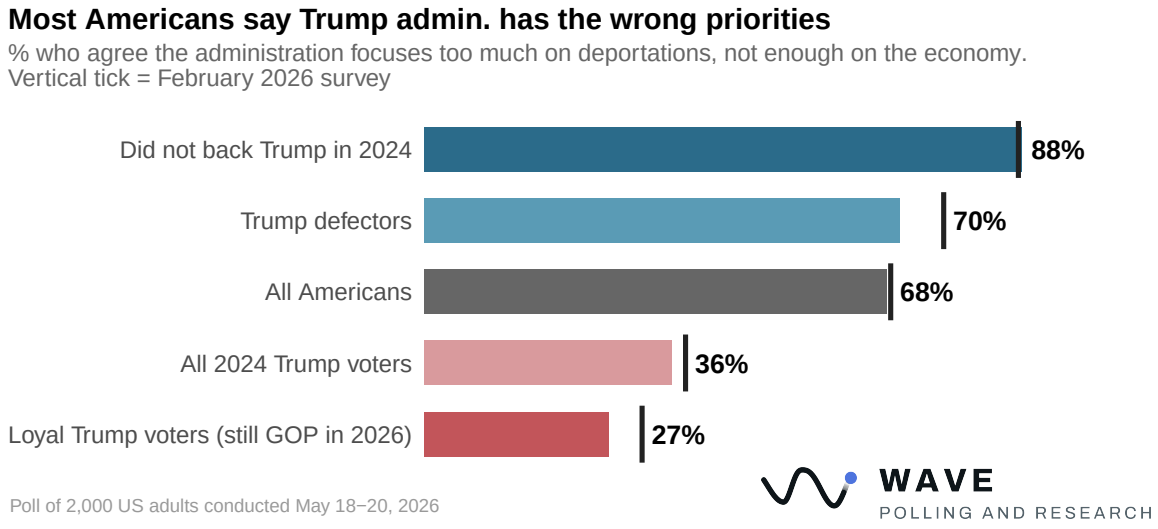
A new national survey of 2,000 U.S. adults finds the Trump administration deeply underwater on the two issues on which he won the 2024 election: net approval of the president's handling of the economy sits at –35, and of his handling of immigration enforcement at –13. What links the two is a question of priorities — 68% of Americans say the administration is focused too much on deportations and not enough on the cost of living.

Among the 2024 Trump voters now leaving his coalition, the economy, the president's personal conduct in office, and immigration/deportations are leading reasons for defection. Several findings bear on how immigration and the economy register with voters. Key findings:

1. Voters (still) believe the administration has the wrong priorities.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans agree that "the Trump administration is focusing too much on deportations and not focusing enough on fixing the economy, inflation, and the rising cost of living." This is one percentage point less than the share of Americans who said the same in a February survey by Wave Polling and Research.

At 68%, this is not a narrow partisan reaction. Breaking the electorate out by 2024 vote and 2026 generic-ballot intent shows how broad this anxiety is: among **all 2024 Trump voters** just over a third agree — but that average masks significant differences among voters who are still with Trump, and those who have defected. Among the **2024 Trump voters we call "defectors"** — those who say they will not vote Republican in the House midterms in 2026 — agreement reaches **69%**, on par with the national average. Only Trump's still-loyal 2024 voters hold out, at 27%. Most Americans feel Trump is not solving the most urgent problems of the day, and focusing too much on immigration policy and deportations.



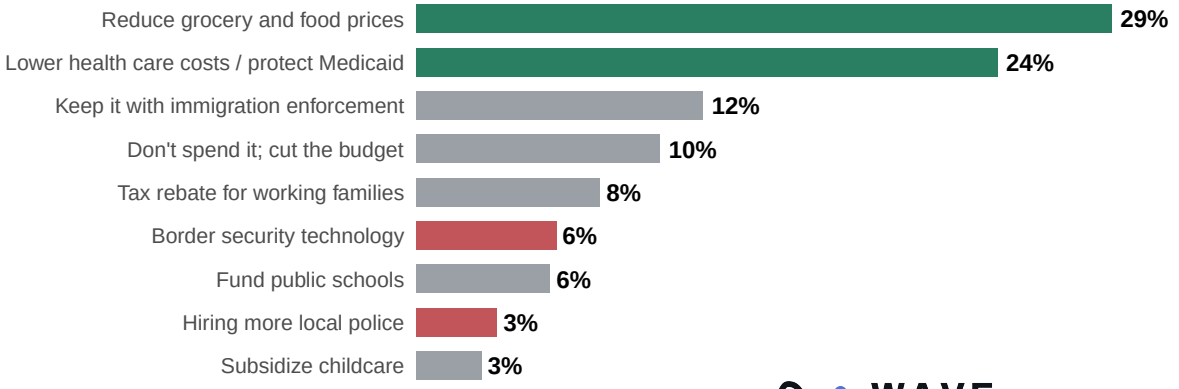
2. Voters favor spending on health care and social programs, not crime and the border

If money were redirected away from immigration enforcement, where should it go? Most Americans want the government to use it to decrease the cost of living. We asked U.S. adults what they would do with a hypothetical budget surplus that resulted from reduced funding for immigration enforcement. They would prefer to use the funds to lower health care costs and protect Medicaid (25%), subsidize other household costs, or return the funds to the treasury to reduce the budget deficit.

Two issues related to crime and the border sit far down the list — spending the money to hire more local police drew just 3% support, and border-security technology was at 6%. More voters would rather the government keep the money with immigration enforcement (12%) or not spend it at all (10%) than put it toward police or border hardware.

Voters would redirect immigration enforcement money to health care and the deficit, not policing or border security technology

All US adults; best use of funds redirected from immigration enforcement (green = cost of living, red = security)



Poll of 2,000 US adults conducted May 18–20, 2026

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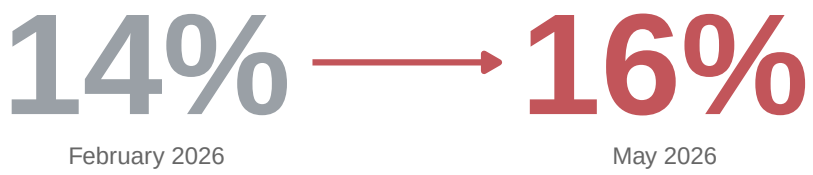
3. Trump's 2024 coalition is still cracking — and immigration is one of the reasons

Defection from Trump's 2024 coalition remains substantial. On a like-for-like basis, the share of Trump's 2024 voters who would no longer vote Republican was **14% in February and 16% in May**. The 2-point difference is within the margin of sampling error, so the level is the story: roughly one in six of Trump's own 2024 voters has left the fold, and that gap has not closed since February.

Defection from Trump's 2024 coalition has not receded

Share of 2024 Trump voters who would not vote Republican in the 2026 generic ballot
(2−point rise is within the margin of sampling error)



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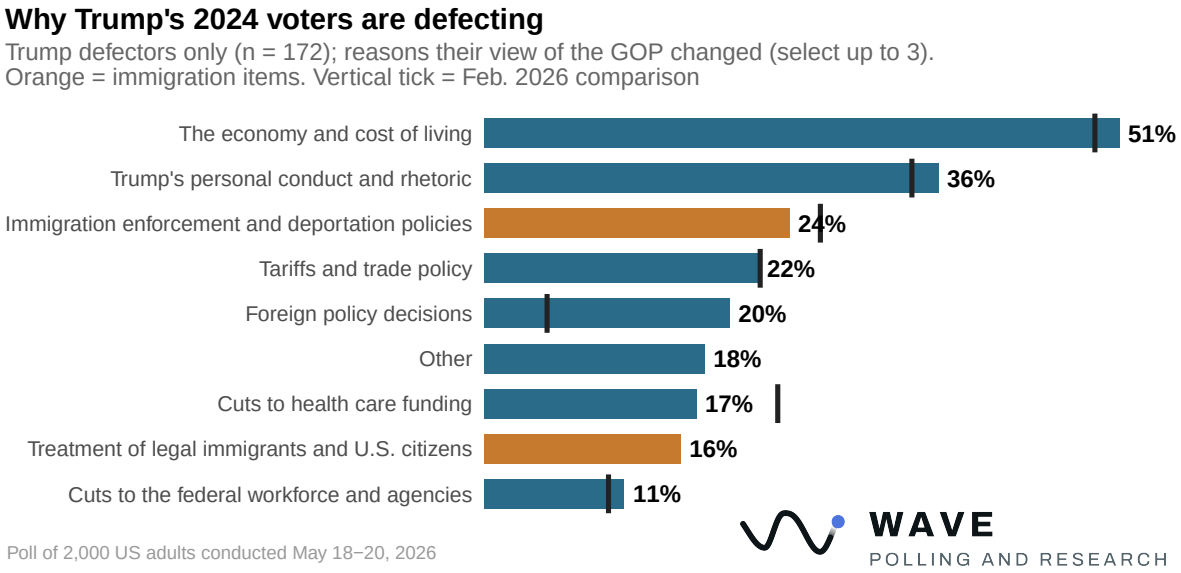
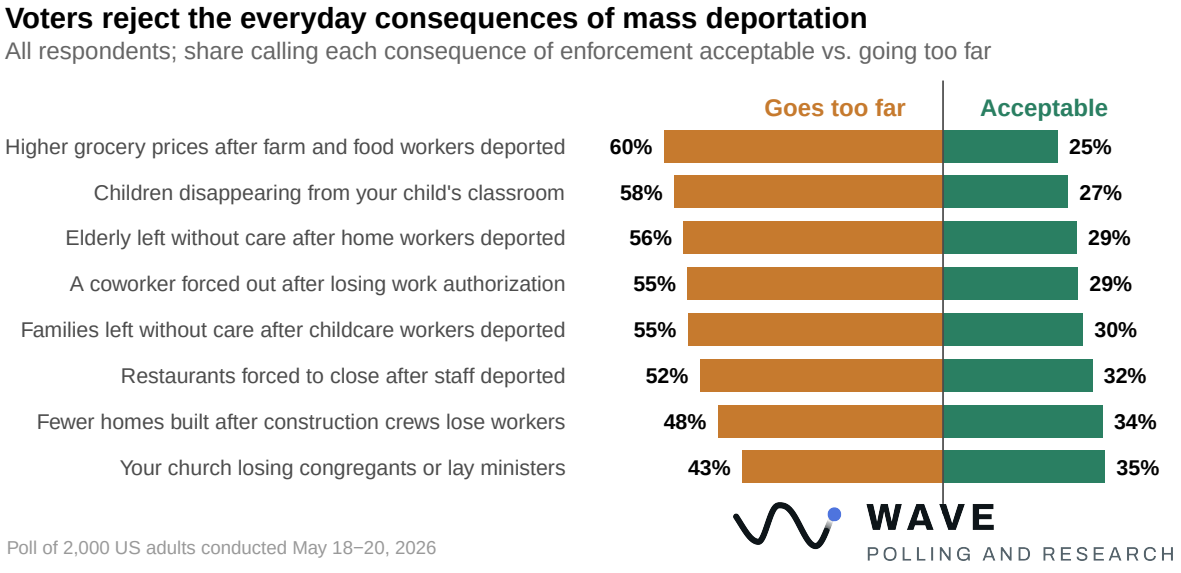
Why are they leaving? Asked to pick the biggest reasons their view of the Republican Party changed since 2024 (respondents could select up to three), defectors name the economy and cost of living first (52%), immigration second (38%, combining two questions), and Trump's personal conduct third (35%). That immigration total splits into two distinct grievances — enforcement and deportation policy (23%) and the treatment of legal immigrants and U.S. citizens (15%).



4. Voters think deportations raise prices and harm families

Asked which view comes closer to their own, **53%** of U.S. adults say mass deportation of immigrant workers is hurting the economy and raising costs for American families, against 35% who say the deportations are necessary to "protect American jobs and enforce the law." A parallel question finds **56%** saying the administration's enforcement is tearing apart families and driving up costs for everyone, against 34% who say it is making America safer and protecting workers.

We also asked U.S. adults to judge a series of concrete consequences of stepped-up enforcement, and majorities call nearly every one of them "going too far." Higher grocery prices after farm and food workers are deported is the most-rejected (60% say it goes too far), and children disappearing from a classroom (57%), elderly people losing the home workers who care for them (55%), a coworker forced out after losing work authorization (55%), and restaurants closing for lack of staff (52%) all draw clear majorities. Only slower home construction (48%) and churches losing congregants (43%) fall just short of a majority — and even those outweigh the share calling them acceptable.



5. Pro-immigrant sentiment holds regardless of whether leaders caveat with messages about crime, policing, or border funding

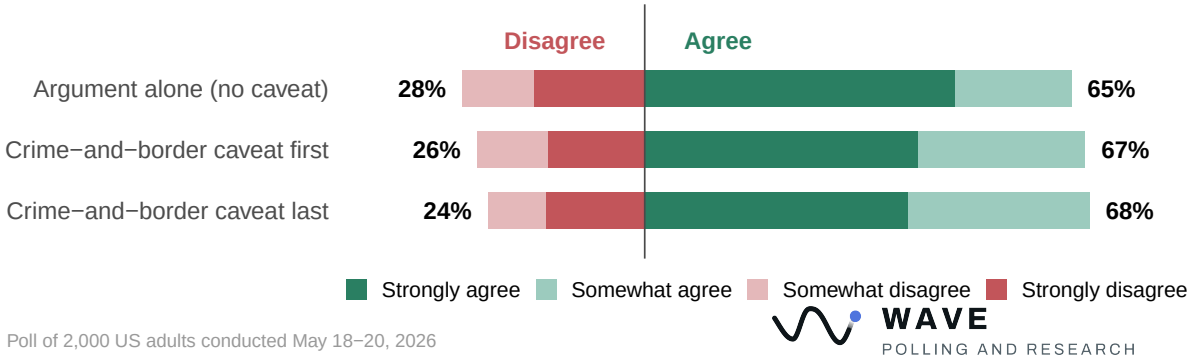
A randomized experiment tested whether pairing a crime-and-border caveat with cost-of-living language changes how voters respond to pro-immigrant messaging. All three groups rated how much they agree with the statement that the administration is going too far by deporting immigrant workers who pay taxes and have not committed

crimes, while grocery prices, tariffs, and lost health coverage drive up the cost of living. The versions differed only in the presence and position of an added a crime-and-border caveat — the concession that "we need secure borders" and "should deport undocumented immigrants who have committed a violent crime" — placed before the argument, after it, or not at all.

All three versions landed at 66–68% agreement — a spread well within the survey's margin of sampling error. The caveat did not materially increase agreement. If anything it reduced intensity of the pro-immigrant policy: "strongly agree" fell from 48% with the argument alone to 42% and 40% when the caveat was added first or last. Support for the cost-of-living argument against mass deportation is broadly consistent regardless of framing.

Adding a crime−and−border caveat does not raise support for immigration policy

% who agree vs. disagree with a statement that attacks on immigrant workers go too far and are driving up the cost of living, by experimental arm



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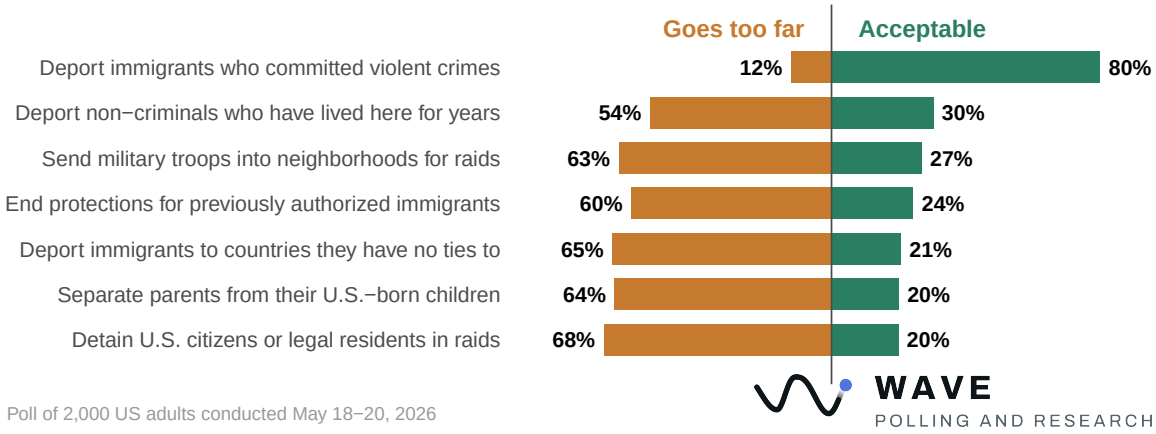
6. Voters see deportations of non-criminal immigrants as clear policy overreach

Deporting immigrants who committed violent crimes is acceptable to **80%** of Americans. But nearly every other enforcement action — detaining citizens, separating families, military raids, deporting long-term residents — reads as "going too far" to clear majorities of Americans (at 53–68% agreeing actions "go too far").

The single most-cited grievance about current immigration enforcement is U.S. citizens or legal resident being wrongly detained by federal agents (34%). In a separate survey experiment, concern about large-scale detention runs near two-thirds *regardless of what the facilities are called* ("detention facilities," "warehouses," and "detention camps" land within four points of one another).

Only deporting violent criminals draws majority approval

All respondents; share calling each enforcement action acceptable vs. going too far



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7. Key questions among working-class and working-class Hispanic voters.

The survey included a 1,000-person oversample of low-income adults (household income under $60,000), supporting a robust working-class subsample. Working-class voters are markedly sourer on the economy than the nation as a whole — but **on immigration they look essentially the same as everyone else**. This is in contrast with conventional wisdom about working class voters – that they lean more to the right on issues such as immigration

and crime.

Comparing net approval of Trump's handling of each issue between the full sample and working-class voters makes the contrast clear: the working-class penalty on economic issues runs 4–7 points, while the gap on immigration enforcement and border security is just 1–2 points.

Issue (net approval)	Full sample	Working class	Gap
The economy	-34	-40	-6
Tariffs and trade	-28	-32	-4
Health care	-26	-29	-3
Cuts to federal spending	-18	-21	-3
Deportations / immigration enforcement	*-13*	*-13*	*+0*
Border security	*-1*	*-3*	*-2*

Italic rows = immigration items. Net approval = share who approve minus share who disapprove.

Measure	All Americans	Working class	Working-class Hispanic
Say the economy is their most important voting issue	43%	45%	46%
Agree the administration is too focused on deportations	68%	68%	71%
Net approval — Trump's handling of the economy	-34	-40	-54
Net approval — Trump's handling of immigration enforcement	-13	-13	-44
Say mass deportation is hurting the economy and raising costs	53%	51%	62%
Generic ballot — net Democratic margin (D minus R)	+9	+11	+22

Working-class = household income under $60,000 (unweighted N = 1,325); working-class Hispanic N = 221, so those figures are directional. Net approval is the share who approve minus the share who disapprove.

On every pocketbook measure, working-class voters run well behind the national average, and working-class Hispanic voters further still. But on immigration enforcement the working-class gap nearly vanishes — these voters are not more hawkish on immigration, only more economically strained. The 2026 generic ballot among adults favors Democrats by 11 points, 52% for Democrats vs 41% for Republicans. Working-class Hispanic voters are sharply negative on the administration's record and break Democratic on the 2026 generic ballot by roughly 20 points.

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.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by Wave Polling and Research. Data were collected by Verasight, a mixed-mode survey provider, from May 18 to May 20, 2026. The sample consists of 2,000 U.S. adults aged 18 and older: 1,000 in a nationally representative sample and 1,000 in an oversample of low-income respondents, defined as those with a confirmed household income under $60,000. The margin of sampling error — which accounts for the design effect and is calculated using the classical random-sampling formula — is ±3.1 percentage points for the nationally representative sample and ±3.4 points for the low-income oversample.

Recruitment and data quality

All respondents were recruited via email from the Verasight Community, composed of individuals recruited through random address-based sampling, random person-to-person text messaging, and dynamic online targeting. Community members are verified through multi-step authentication, including an SMS response from a mobile phone registered with a major U.S. carrier and within-survey technology such as Google reCAPTCHA v3; members who exhibit low-quality response behavior over time, such as straight-lining or speeding, are removed. Because respondents are never routed from one survey to another and are compensated for every invited survey, there is no incentive to answer screener questions strategically. After data collection, the Verasight team confirms that responses correspond to U.S. IP addresses, removes duplicate and non-human responses, and drops respondents who failed in-survey attention or straight-lining checks or who completed the survey in under 30% of the median completion time. Verasight is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research Transparency Initiative; as in any survey, unmeasured error may exist.

Weighting

The data are weighted to match the April 2026 Current Population Survey on age, race/ethnicity, sex, income (nationally representative sample only), 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. To produce nationally representative estimates across all 2,000 respondents, the two samples are integrated with a combined national weight that holds low-income adults to their correct national share while pooling the full set of low-income respondents.

Definitions and comparisons

Trump defectors are 2024 Trump voters who now say they would vote Democratic, would not vote, or are unsure in the 2026 generic ballot. February 2026 figures are from a separate national survey of 1,500 U.S. adults fielded February 6–10, 2026. The crime-and-border-caveat and detention-facility-label findings come from questions randomized between respondents. Subgroup estimates — Trump defectors (172 respondents) and working-class Hispanic voters (221) — carry wider error margins and should be read as indicative.

For questions about this memo or the underlying survey data, contact Wave Polling and Research at contact@wavepolling.com.