WAVE
POLLING AND RESEARCH

Wrong Priorities

Deportations, affordability, and the erosion of Trump's 2024 coalition

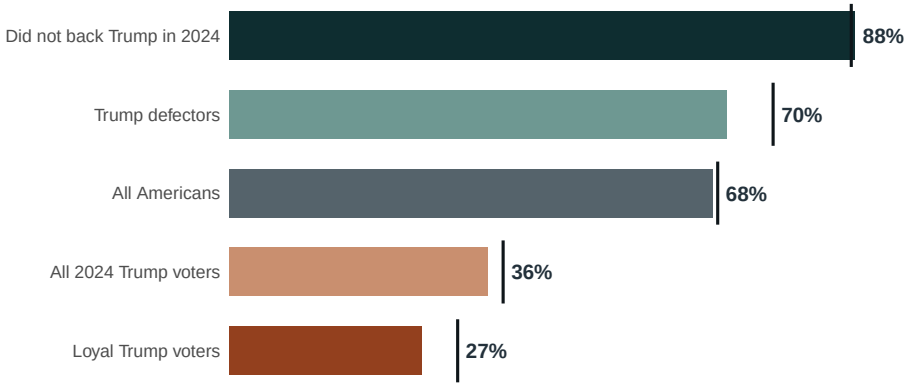
National survey of 2,000 U.S. adults · May 18–20, 2026

G. Elliott Morris
Wave Polling and Research | May 2026
wavepolling.com

Finding 1: Americans say Trump has the wrong priorities

68% say the Trump administration has the wrong priorities

% who agree it focuses too much on deportations, not enough on the economy | Tick = February 2026

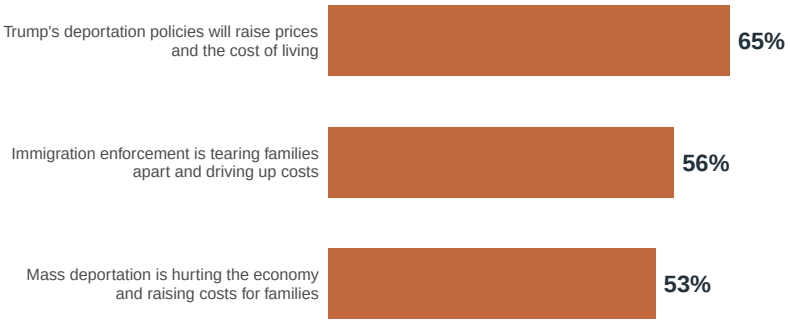


National survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, May 18–20, 2026.

Finding 2: Voters think deportations raise prices and harm families

Across three questions, voters say deportations raise costs and harm families

Share choosing the cost–and–harm view | the opposing view drew 34–35% (only 8% expect prices to fall)



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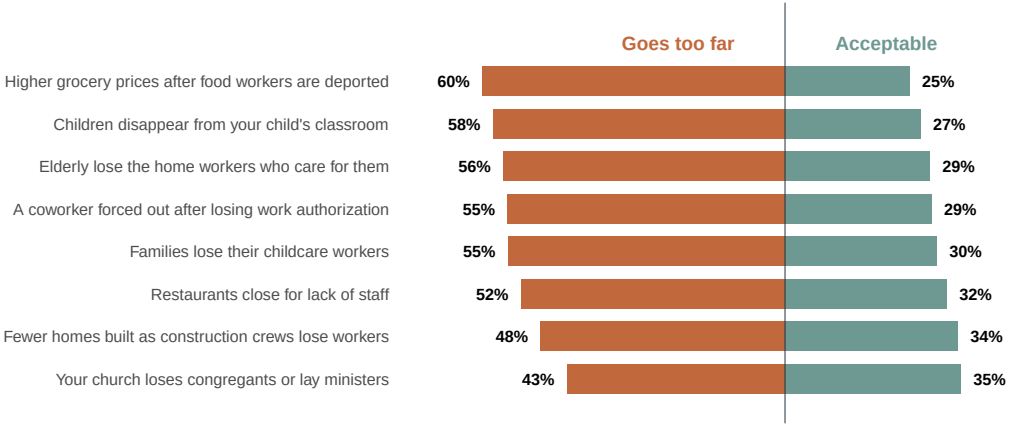
Finding 2: Voters reject the everyday consequences of deportation

Voters reject the everyday consequences of mass deportation

Share calling each consequence of stepped−up enforcement acceptable vs. going too far



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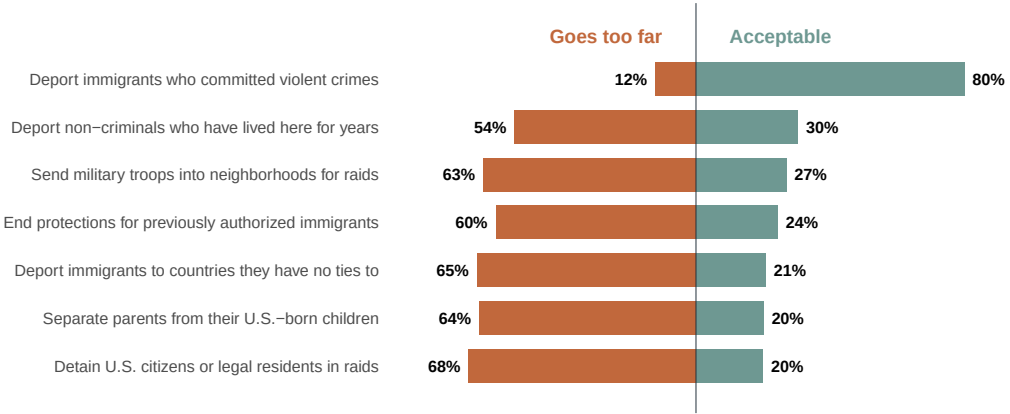
Finding 3: Only violent-crime deportations draw majority approval

Enforcement reads as overreach to clear majorities

Share calling each enforcement action acceptable vs. going too far



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Finding 4: Trump's 2024 coalition keeps cracking

14%
February 2026

→

16%
May 2026

of 2024 Trump voters would not vote Republican in the 2026 generic ballot

Roughly one in six of Trump's own 2024 voters has left the fold — and that gap has **not closed** since February. The 2-point rise is within the margin of sampling error; the story is the persistence of the level.

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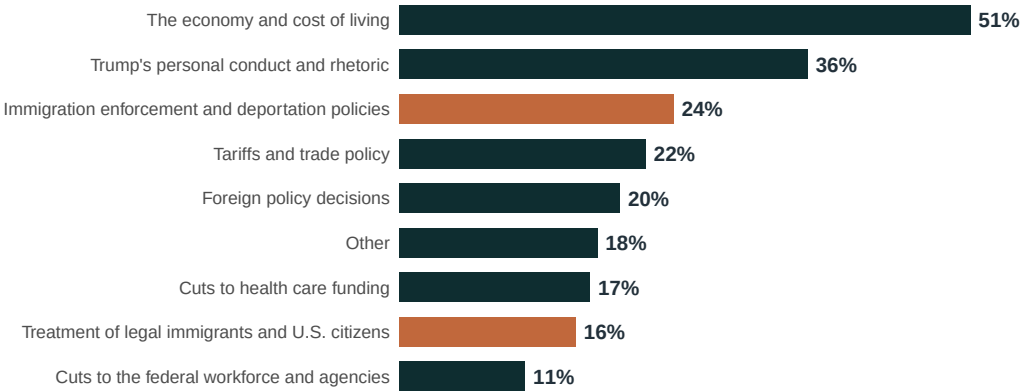
Finding 4: Why Trump's 2024 voters are defecting

The economy leads, immigration is second

Trump defectors only; reasons their view of the GOP changed (select up to 3) | orange = immigration



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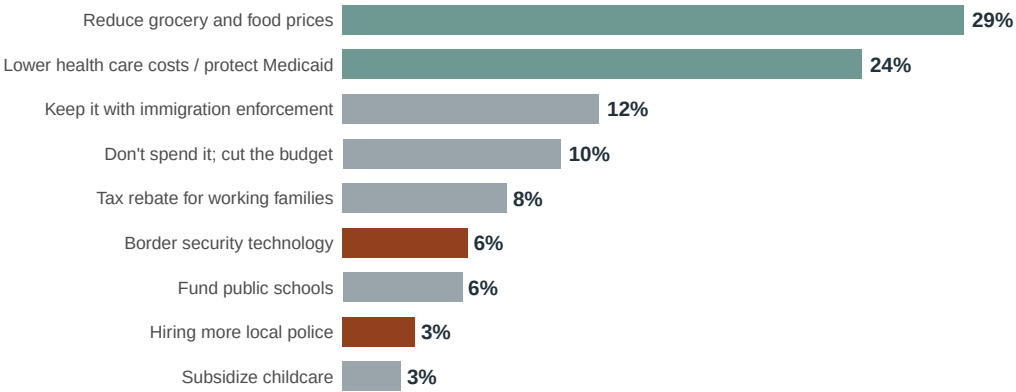
Finding 5: Voters would spend on costs, not security

Redirect enforcement money to health care, not police or the border

Best use of funds redirected from immigration enforcement | green = cost of living, red = security



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Finding 6: A randomized test of immigration messaging

Could a pro-immigrant, cost-of-living argument land better if it first concedes ground on crime and the border? A randomized experiment in the survey put that to the test.

- Every respondent was **randomly assigned** to one of three versions of the same core argument — that Trump's deportations go too far and raise the cost of living
- Each version went to a random third of the sample — roughly **660–680 respondents** each
- After reading, respondents rated their agreement on a **four-point scale**
- The versions differed in one element: a **crime-and-border caveat** placed **before** the argument, **after** it, or **left out**

The question: does leading with a concession broaden support — or just cost intensity?

Finding 6: The three messages we tested

Version A — argument alone, no caveat (n = 659)

"Attacks on immigrant workers go too far. We're deporting immigrant workers who pay taxes and haven't committed a crime. Meanwhile, grocery prices are skyrocketing, chaotic tariffs are raising prices on hard-working Americans, and people are losing their Medicaid coverage."

Version B — crime-and-border caveat first (n = 662)

"**We need secure borders, and we should deport undocumented immigrants who have committed a violent crime.** But Trump goes too far. He's driving up food costs with ICE raids at restaurants and farms, deporting immigrants married to U.S. citizens, and using masked agents to take people to undisclosed locations. Instead, we should focus on lowering costs and building an economy where hard-working Americans can get ahead."

Version C — crime-and-border caveat last (n = 679)

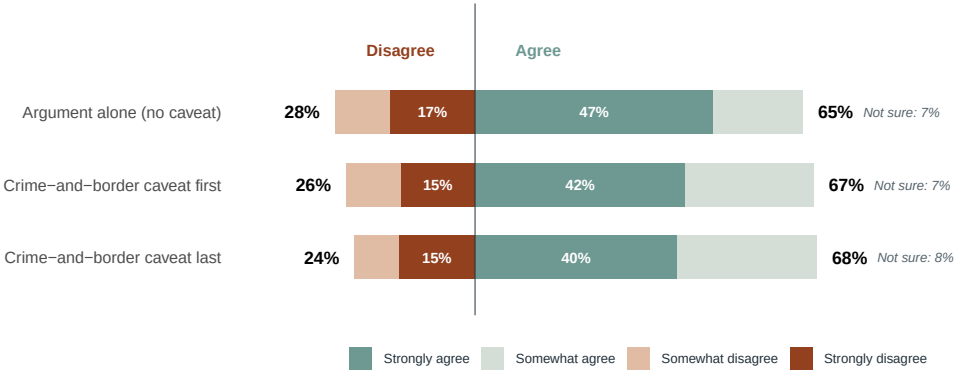
"Trump's immigration policies are driving up food costs with ICE raids at restaurants and farms, deporting immigrants married to U.S. citizens, and using masked agents to take people to undisclosed locations. We should focus on lowering costs and building an economy where hard-working Americans can get ahead — **while keeping our borders secure and deporting undocumented immigrants who commit violent crimes.**"

Orange = the added crime-and-border caveat.

Finding 6: A border/crime caveat adds nothing to immigration message

The anti–deportation message lands at two–thirds, with or without a caveat

% who agree vs. disagree that attacks on immigrant workers go too far and raise costs, by experiment arm



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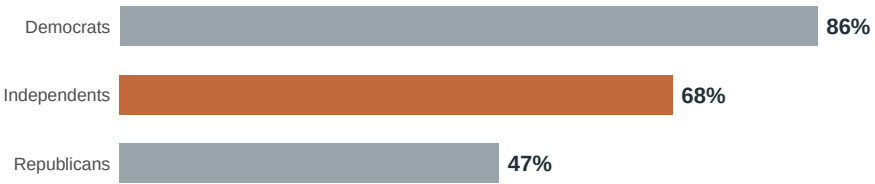
Finding 6: The economic bridge reaches across party lines

More than two−thirds of independents back the economic bridge

% who agree with the anti−deportation statement, by party ID (all experiment arms pooled) | orange = swing voters



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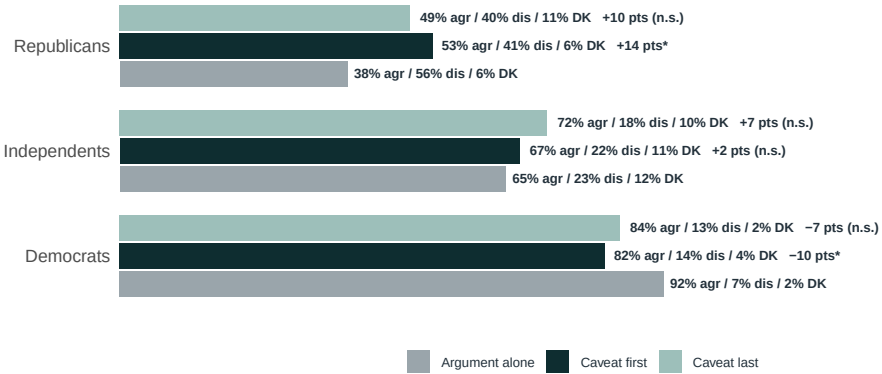
Independents — the swing voters — back the message 68%, and nearly half of Republicans agree. The crime-and-border caveat does not change these party splits.

Finding 6: The caveat moves Republicans — and only Republicans

Adding the caveat lifts Republican agreement 11−−14 points

% agree / % disagree / % DK with the anti−deportation statement, by party and experiment arm | treatment effect on agree share vs. argument alone: * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001



National survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, May 18−20, 2026.

Finding 6: What the message test shows

Total agreement barely moved

- 66%, 67%, and 68% agreed across the three versions — a 2-point spread, well within the margin of sampling error
- Leading with a crime-and-border concession did **not** broaden support

But the caveat reduced intensity

- “Strongly agree” fell from **48%** with the argument alone to **42%** with the caveat first and **40%** with it last
- Conceding ground up front trades away committed supporters for no new ones

The takeaway

- The cost-of-living argument already lands with two-thirds of voters on its own
- Don’t pre-negotiate on crime and the border — make the affordability case directly and let it stand

Working-Class Deep Dive

Hispanic and Black working-class voters

Working class = household income under $60,000 — a 1,325-respondent subsample drawn from a 1,000-person low-income oversample

A cost-of-living divide, not an immigration divide

Working-class voters are far sourer on the economy than the nation — yet on immigration they look just like everyone else.

Issue (net approval)	Full sample	Working class	Gap
The economy	–36	–44	**–8**
Tariffs and trade	–30	–36	**–6**
Health care	–28	–34	**–6**
Cuts to federal spending	–19	–24	**–5**
Deportations / immigration enforcement	*–14*	*–15*	*–1*
Border security	*–1*	*–3*	*–2*

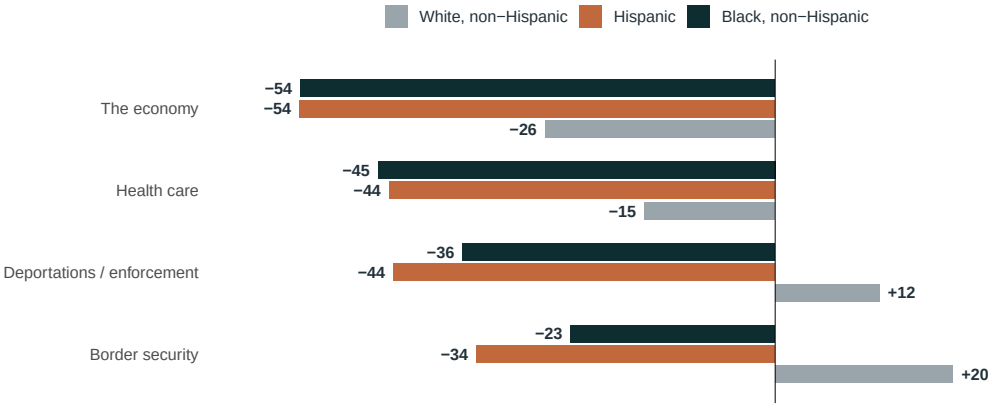
The penalty runs **5–8 points on pocketbook issues** but all but **vanishes on immigration**. These voters are economically strained, not more hawkish.

Italic rows = immigration items. National survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, May 18–20, 2026.

Within the working class, race is the dividing line

Working−class Hispanic and Black voters are far more critical of Trump

Net approval of Trump's handling of each issue, working−class subsample by race/ethnicity



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Working-class Hispanic voters: the contested group

43–21

Democratic edge on the 2026 generic ballot

Still Republican-competitive — but sharply anti-overreach

- Net approval of Trump on **the economy: –54**
- **71%** say the administration is too focused on deportations, not the cost of living
- **62%** say mass deportation is *hurting* the economy and raising costs
- The genuinely **contested** working-class group: persuadable on the ballot, yet deeply negative on enforcement and the economy

Working-class Hispanic respondents (unweighted N = 221); figures are directional. National survey, May 18–20, 2026.

Working-class Black voters: overwhelmingly opposed

57–12

Democratic edge on the 2026 generic ballot

Deeply negative on Trump across the board

- Net approval of Trump on **the economy: –54** and **immigration enforcement: –36**
- **79%** say the administration is too focused on deportations — the highest of any group
- **64%** say enforcement is tearing apart families and driving up costs
- Not a persuasion target so much as a **turnout and intensity** audience — already overwhelmingly Democratic

Working-class Black respondents (unweighted N = 193); figures are directional. National survey, May 18–20, 2026.

The anti-deportation message works best with these voters

Messaging agreement overall and by working class x race

% who agree with the anti−deportation statement (all experiment arms pooled)

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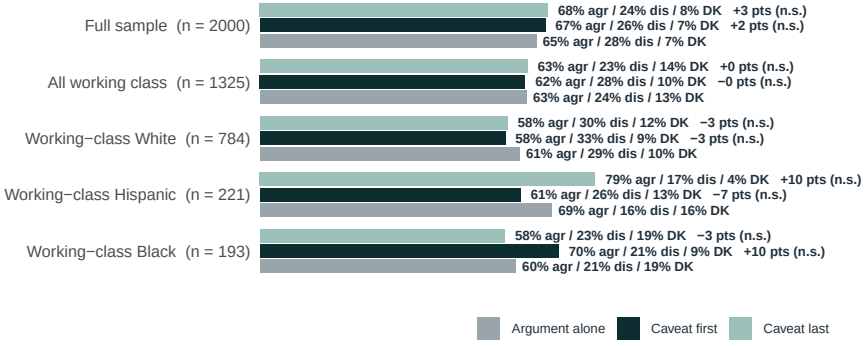
Messaging agreement by experimental condition and working class x race

Each message lands similarly across working−class race groups

% agree / % disagree / % DK with the anti−deportation statement, by experiment arm | treatment effect on agree share vs. argument alone: * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001



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Working-class Hispanic and Black subgroups have small per-arm samples (n = 58–81); arm-level differences within these groups are directional.

Key findings

1. **Wrong priorities:** 68% of Americans say the administration is too focused on deportations and not enough on the cost of living
2. **Deportation as countrywide self-harm:** majorities say mass deportation raises prices and harms families — and reject nearly every everyday consequence of it
3. **The economic bridge:** two-thirds agree with the anti-deportation "economic bridge" message — and border/crime caveats add no support
4. **A cost-of-living divide:** working-class voters are sourer on the economy, not more hawkish on immigration — working-class Hispanic and Black voters are the message's strongest audiences

Strategic implications

Immigration enforcement is a vulnerability — but the economy is the engine

- 68% say the administration is too focused on deportations vs. the cost of living
- ~16% of Trump's 2024 coalition has defected; the economy leads the reasons, immigration is second

Lead with cost of living; the immigration argument follows

- The anti-deportation message already lands with two-thirds of voters
- A border/crime caveat is not required — it adds nothing and slightly softens intensity
- Voters want enforcement money spent on costs, not police or border hardware

The class divide is a cost-of-living divide

- Working-class voters are sourer on the economy, not more hawkish on immigration
- Working-class Hispanic and Black voters are the message's strongest audiences

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Thank You

Questions and discussion welcome

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