

Chicago Council Survey

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October 11, 2012

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

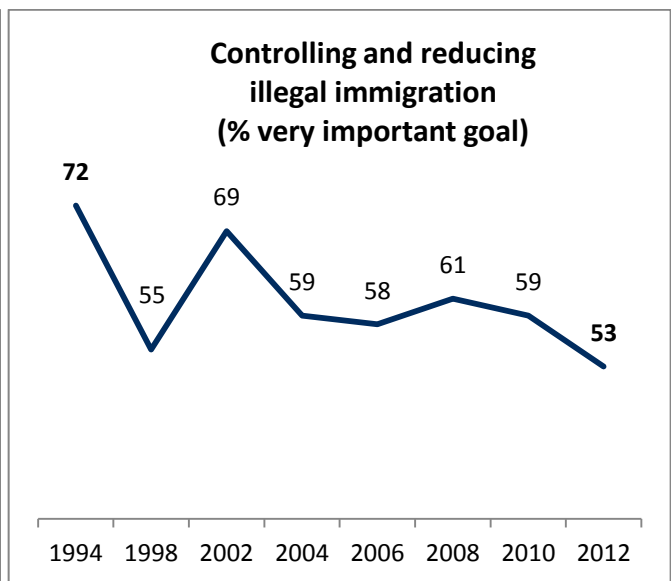
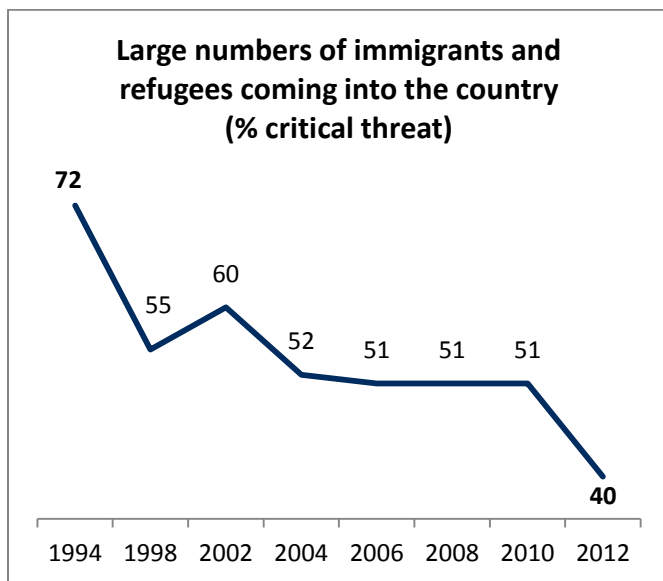
Number of Americans Who See Immigration as a Critical Threat to the United States at Lowest Level in Two Decades

The 2012 Chicago Council Survey reveals that Americans have grown less concerned over the last decade about large numbers of immigrants—legal or illegal—coming to live and work in the United States. In addition, a growing number of Americans support keeping legal immigration at its current level or increasing it.

Minority Considers Large Numbers of Immigrants a Critical Threat

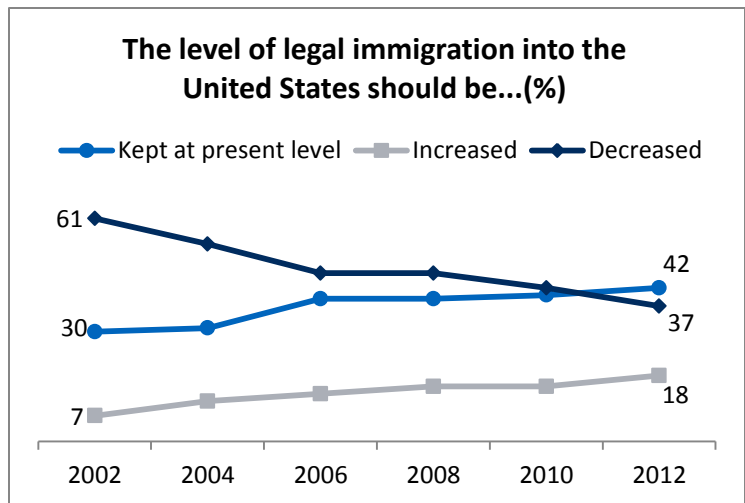
For the first time in *Chicago Council Survey* history on this question, only a minority (40%) of Americans consider a large influx of immigrants and refugees a “critical threat” to the United States. And fewer now than ever recorded in these surveys (53%) say that “controlling and reducing illegal immigration” is a very important foreign policy goal for the United States.

The recently released 2012 *Chicago Council Survey* results show that concern about many threats has lessened, including terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. However, immigration has seen the greatest decline of all threats currently asked about: Public perceptions of immigration as a critical threat has declined 32 points, and reducing illegal immigration as a top goal has declined 19 points.

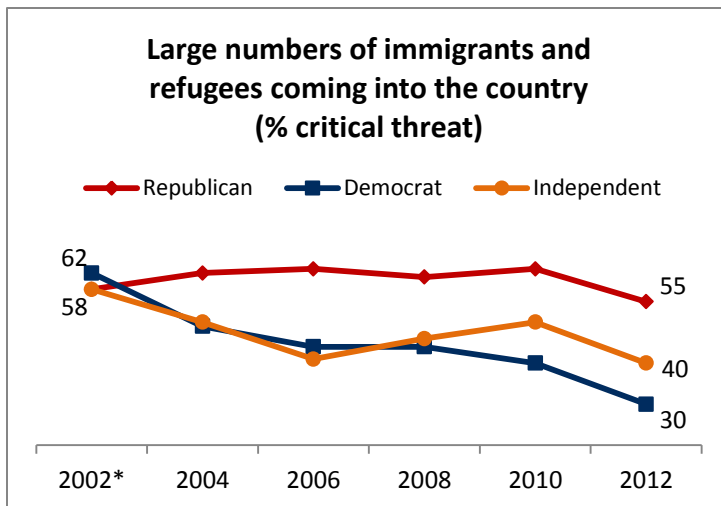


Plurality of Americans Support Maintaining Current Immigration Levels

For the first time since this question was asked in 2002, the 2012 *Chicago Council Survey* finds more Americans support keeping immigration at present levels (42%) than favor decreasing them (37%). This is a striking change in opinion from ten years ago when six in ten Americans favored decreasing immigration levels. While still relatively low, the proportion of Americans supporting an increase in legal immigration levels over the past ten years has more than doubled, from seven percent in 2002 to 18 percent today.



Republicans' Concerns Remain Steady; Democrats and Independents Less Threatened



Although concern over immigration levels has declined significantly in the last decade among all political groups, a wide partisan divide over immigration issues persists. A majority of Republicans still consider large inflows of immigrants and refugees a “critical” threat. Democrats continue to feel the least threatened, with only 30 percent seeing this as a critical threat (down from 62 percent in 2002). Among Independents, threat perceptions on this issue have also decreased steadily over the last decade, from 58 in 2002 to 40 percent in 2012.

Among Public, Bipartisan Support Is Strong for Immigration Reform

Large majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents favor a widely discussed version of immigration reform that would encompass securing the border, penalizing employers who hire illegal immigrants, and requiring illegal immigrants to either leave the country or enter a program toward citizenship that involves paying back taxes and learning English¹. In fact, favorability for this version of immigration reform is the highest among Republicans (87% vs. 75% among Democrats and 76% among

¹ The full wording of the question: “One version of immigration reform that people have discussed would do the following: Greater efforts would be made to secure the border, to identify illegal immigrants, and to penalize employers who hire them. Illegal immigrants would be required either to leave the country or to enter a program toward citizenship that would require them to pay back taxes and to learn English. Do you favor or oppose this version of immigration reform?”

Independents). Overall, eight in ten Americans support it. However, other surveys have shown that opinion is divided when asked about individual components or specific policies such as allowing unauthorized immigrant workers to stay in the United States with temporary legal status.

More Midwesterners Feel Threatened

Compared to other regions of the country, Midwesterners are more threatened by high levels of immigration (45%, vs. 39%) and are slightly more inclined to put a high priority on controlling and reducing illegal immigration (58%, vs. 51%). However, they do not significantly differ in views on immigration reform or on levels of legal immigration.

Solid majorities in the Midwest are also under the impression that most recent immigrants to the Midwest are here illegally (a slight majority believe that most immigrants in their own community are here legally). This misperception negatively impacts their views on immigration policy proposals.

A Note on Methods

This report is based on the results of two surveys commissioned by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, both conducted by GfK Custom Research. The panel for both surveys is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. The first, a national survey, was conducted between May 25 and June 8, 2012, among a nationally representative sample of 1,877 adults. The margin of error for this survey is $\pm 3\%$. The second, a Midwest survey, was conducted between August 16 and August 27, 2012, among a representative sample of 1,062 adults living in the twelve-state Midwest. The margin of error for this survey is $\pm 4\%$.

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The full report on the *2012 Chicago Council Survey*, "Foreign Policy in the New Millennium," is available at www.thechicagocouncil.org; the report on the *Midwest Immigration Survey* is forthcoming.